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"I see that you do know me," the disguised detective had to admit.
"Oh, yes, as a man of many masks, I know you, Mr. Doom."

OR, A Man of Many Masks.

A Romance of Ferrets and Felons.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE BUCCANEER MIDSHIPMAN,"
"DASHING CHARLIE" NOVELS, "DICK
DOOM" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DICK DOOM RECEIVES A LETTER.

A YOUNG man, grip in hand, arrived, upon a Night Express from the West, in New York City and was driven to the Barrett House, where he secured a pleasant room, and while making his toilet called for a messenger and dispatched him with a hastily written note which was addressed to the "Chief of Police."

Before the messenger returned with an an-

swer there came a knock at the young man's door and in walked a handsome-looking man dressed in a neat-fitting uniform.

"Ah, chief, I am delighted to see you, for I did not anticipate the honor of a visit from you," said the young man.

"I came as soon as I received your note, Mr. Doom, for I preferred to deliver your letters in person, and also wished to welcome you back to New York," and the chief warmly shook hands with the young man, at the same time placing upon the table before him a package of letters.

"The letters will keep, so sit down, sir, and let us have a talk together," and the bell was rung for a bottle of wine and cigars.

"The letters will not keep, for they are urgent, so look at them please, for I wish to consult you.

"But, how did you enjoy your visit to the Wild West, Mr. Doom?"

"It was one of business as well as pleasure, for I was upon a trail of my own, and which has been so securely hidden that I have never yet found the clew, the missing key to unlock the mystery I would solve.

"Still, I had a pleasant trip, but have been so long where I could neither receive letters or papers, that I know nothing of what has been going on in the world."

"Read this letter from the chief of police of New Orleans and you will get some important news, for I have also had one from him upon the same subject."

"Ah! more trouble in the Crescent City, eh?"

"Yes, your man Valentine Gibson has escaped; but read your letter for it will doubtless tell you all."

"Valentine Gibson has escaped?"

"A man sentenced to be hanged has foiled the gallows?"

"There is something wrong here," and the young man spoke rather to himself than the chief of police.

But he tore open the letter of the chief of police of New Orleans and hastily read aloud as follows:

"MY DEAR DICK:—

"You will be startled to know that Valentine Gibson has escaped from prison, and just six weeks before the day upon which he was to have been hanged.

"It was as clever an escape as I ever knew of, and was done under the garb of a clergyman.

"The prisoner has been allowed to see his clergyman regularly, and as he could only call at night an exception was made in his case, and he was admitted.

"Upon the third night before the escape a strange clergyman presented himself to the keeper, with a letter from the Reverend Doctor Douglass, stating that he was called away by the illness of his son at a northern college, and his assistant, the Reverend Slygh, would, in his absence, administer to the spiritual comfort of the prisoner.

"The paper was headed with the name of the church, the writing appeared to be that of the reverend doctor, the newspapers had spoken of his having been called North to see his son, who had been taken ill, and it was known that he had lately been allowed an assistant in his parish.

"So the keeper admitted the regular Slygh on that and the following night.

"Upon the third night it stormed, and the clergyman was all muffled up.

"He came earlier than his wont, was admitted to the cell, remained but a short while and passed out,

"The relief guard went on, and soon after another clergyman all muffle up, passed from the cell and out of the prison and yard.

"He had just gone out when one of the old guard called out to know if the clergyman had made two visits that night.

"Investigation then revealed the fact that the clergyman was about the size of the prisoner, not unlike him in carriage and face, and he had boldly planned the escape by deceiving the relief guard.

"Of course, the alarm was given, but a plot so well executed was planned by one who was clever enough to effect the escape of the prisoner after he emerged from the prison, and we have found no clew to his whereabouts.

"Under these circumstances, as you were the one who tracked him down, as the murderer of his father, the aider and abettor of the murder of Gordon Grayhurst, (for though killed in a duel, it was a murder through the act of Gibson not loading his pistol,) and last the doing away of his young wife, I call upon you to aid me in his recapture; in fact, my dear friend, put the case wholly in your hands.

"I have written the chief of police, New York, of his escape, as well as to other cities, and send this letter to his care.

"Of course, the prisoner is not in New Orleans; but I leave all to you.

"Let me hear from you as soon as you receive this. Yours as ever, etc."

Such was the letter which Dick Doom read aloud.

CHAPTER II.

"I WILL TAKE THE CASE."

"WELL, Dick, what do you think of Gibson's

escape?" asked the New York chief of police when the young man had read the paper carefully through.

Dick Doom paused in his walk, his hands behind his back, for he had begun to pace the floor, and stood regarding himself in a full-length mirror.

There was no vanity in the look, in fact he did not appear to see himself, in spite of his steady gaze.

Still he might have been pardoned for an admiring glance at himself, for he was certainly a most attractive looking person.

His form was slender, graceful in outline, and yet he had the appearance of possessing both strength and endurance.

About the medium height, he was erect and quick in his movements, while he was well-dressed, and his clothes fitted him perfectly.

His face was a study for an artist, for it had all the beauty of a woman, yet was stamped with an expression to do and dare anything that man would face of danger and hardship.

His eyes were large, dark, dreamy and shaded with long lashes, his teeth perfect in shape and white as milk, and his complexion without a blemish though bronzed by exposure.

A man looking at him would call him effeminate, a woman regarding him would say that he was a most manly man.

Such was Dick Doom, the young detective, for he scarcely appeared over twenty, and yet had a record among the chiefs of ferrets as the most daring and dangerous man that could be put upon a criminal's track.

To other than the chiefs he was not known, and this was a law of his which he would brook no breaking of.

He had tracked down the most noted criminals, had sent man after man to prison, had discovered stolen booty and returned it, had run half a dozen men under the shadow of the gallows, and yet would demand that he remain unknown through all, while others got the credit of his deeds.

The rewards that fell to him he was most generous with, sharing them with all allies he had to call to his aid, and the needy of the detective and police force, while he had large sums to his credit yet undrawn.

Who he was not even the chiefs of police knew, other than that he was known by two names, that of Dixie Gray, and which they suspected was his real name, and Dick Doom, which was believed to be an alias.

Such was the young man who stood gazing at himself in the full-length mirror.

At last he answered the question of the chief:

"What do I think of this escape, sir?"

"Yes."

"It was remarkably clever, and planned by a woman."

"A woman?"

"That is my idea, sir."

"But a man played the part of the clergyman."

"Oh, yes, a man did the work, but a woman did the planning."

"I see no reason for your thinking so, Dick."

"Well, sir, had a man planned it, then the plot of escape would have been different.

"There would have been some force used, or ready for use; but, instead, all was peaceful, and that looks as though a woman's hand was at the bottom of it."

"Then, too, Valentine Gibson was under sentence of death, and he had no male friends who would aid him, as they would risk too much."

"He had no pals to help him, for he steered clear of them."

"He had no money with which to pay for his escape, and it would take big money."

"Now he is as handsome a man as I ever saw, has wonderful powers of fascination, wins with the women every time, and there was one who went crazy over him at his trial, it is said, and tried to bribe the jury to clear him, for she is rich."

"That was the woman who paid the money to effect his escape."

"By Jove, Dick, but you reason well."

"But who is she?"

"No one seemed to know, and she disappeared after the trial, so the New Orleans chief wrote me; but it was regarded as a most remarkable case of devotion to a criminal, although you know women are prone to make fools of themselves over gallows heroes, as witness the many instances of the kind in your own city."

"Yes, a man sentenced to be hanged, no matter how foul may have been his crime, appears to hold a strange fascination for a certain class of women, to their disgrace be it said," responded the chief of police.

"Now, had I been in New Orleans, at the trial, I would have made it my business to find out who that woman was, especially when it was said that she gained the right to see the prisoner by claiming to be his sister, when he never had a sister, and the keeper stated he was sure that the two had never met before."

"The papers said that she was young and very beautiful, but nothing was known regarding her."

"Well, I must find out who she was, where from, and where she is, for then I will find Valentine Gibson."

"I believe you are right; but you will undertake the case then?"

"Oh yes, for I have ample leisure upon my hands, and go where fate calls me."

"I was in hopes that I could get you to take a case for me, which baffles all of us."

"I will do so with pleasure."

"Where is it?"

"In Boston, or rather the parties who offer the reward are wealthy Bostonians, and they were robbed in New York on their way home."

"A case of robbery, sir?"

"Yes, and of a hundred thousand dollars in value, with a reward of twenty thousand for the return of the stolen booty."

"I'll take the case, chief," was the quiet response of Dick Doom.

CHAPTER III.

THE DETECTIVE TAKES NOTES.

In one of the grand old homes of Boston sat Mrs. Robin Van Vechten reading a letter brought in to her with a card by the butler in livery.

There was an air of ancient grandeur about the Van Vechten home and all its surroundings.

It was a double house, with wings on either side and an extension in the rear, while it occupied one entire square in spite of the high price of the land about it, for the Van Vechtens were of Boston's best blood.

The rooms were large and elegantly furnished, though the furniture was of a time long gone by.

The walls were hung with the Van Vechten ancestry, the silver service was solid and massive, there was an art gallery in one wing, a music room, parlors, library and sitting-room, with a dining-room that would comfortably seat fifty persons.

The master of this house was a retired banker, a man still under fifty, an enthusiastic yachtsman and a great traveler.

The mistress was a young-looking woman, apparently not over thirty-five, though across the threshold of forty, very refined, very elegant and beautiful.

The heiress to the Van Vechten millions was a lovely maiden of eighteen, who had had the advantage of a governess, much travel abroad, the study of art in Rome and music in Paris, and yet was a true blue little American maiden.

There was a skeleton in the Van Vechten closet, for the first born, a son, for some reasons known not beyond the walls of his home, had mysteriously departed from the home of his ancestors, and whether dead or alive, was certainly dead to his parents, for never was his name spoken in the household, and the picture of a handsome, dashing youth in naval cadet uniform had been "turned to the wall" for years.

The letter which Mrs. Van Vechten was reading was as follows:

"The bearer of this, Mr. Dick Doom, is without an end in the Secret Service, and this is saying a great deal."

"He has undertaken the case of your lost jewels, and I need only say that with him that means success."

"You can trust him under any and all circumstances."

The letter bore the name and title of the chief of police of New York.

The card bore the name:

"DICK DOOM."

"What a strange name," mused Mrs. Van Vechten.

"But this is certainly a very strong letter in his favor from the chief of New York police."

"Grimes, ask the person in, for I will see him."

In response to the command of his mistress Grimes ushered into the room a gentleman dressed in black, with a smooth face, gray hair worn rather long, and gold-rimmed spectacles.

He carried a high hat in one hand, a cane in the other, and wore gloves.

"Mr. Doom, I believe?" said Mrs. Van Vechten, as her eyes took the visitor in.

"Yes, madam, Dick Doom, Detective at Large."

"You have been robbed of some valuable jewels, I learn, and I am here to investigate."

Dick Doom spoke rapidly, and began in a business way.

Mrs. Van Vechten rather liked the man, so said:

"Be seated, please."

Mr. Doom sat down, seemingly not at all impressed with his elegant surroundings.

"Now, madam, your story, please."

"Where shall I begin?" and the lady smiled.

"At the beginning, please, leaving nothing untold, and ending simply when you have no more to say," and Mr. Doom took out his notebook and pencil.

"I will almost feel ashamed to tell you of a suspicion my daughter has, though of course my husband and myself are really indignant with her for feeling as she does toward one to whom we owe so much, our lives in fact."

"Is this the beginning of your story, madam?"

"Well, no, it was merely a suggestion."

"The truth is we have just returned from a visit to Mexico."

"Ah!"

"We went there for a pleasant bit of travel, and while going through the country in our own conveyance, purchased there for the purpose, we were halted by bandits."

"A common occurrence in that land, madam."

"My husband resisted, killing one of the robbers, and for it he was to have been put to death, after he had signed a check for a large sum as ransom for my daughter and myself."

"In the midst of our peril and distress two horsemen appeared upon the scene, boldly attacked the robbers, though they were nine in number, and put them to flight."

"One of the horsemen was killed, but the other, as our coachman had been shot from his box when we halted, sprung to the box, after fastening his horse alongside, and drove off at a tremendous pace, telling us that he too was pursued by bandits."

"That gentleman saved our lives, I know, and we owe to him the deepest gratitude."

"Of course, madam; but who was he?"

"A French nobleman, who had gone to Mexico with Maximilian, when a boy but fourteen, and was again traveling in the country for pleasure."

"We were only too happy to have him attach himself to our party, and he remained with us until we sailed from Vera Cruz for home."

"Who comprised your party, madam?"

"My husband, daughter, self, maid and Mr. Van Vechten's valet."

"And where were you robbed?"

"In New York."

"At your hotel there?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long after your arrival?"

"The very day of our arrival, for when dressing to go to a ball I missed our jewels, and with them a box of vast value intrusted to my keeping by a lady in Mexico to deliver to her son in this country."

"Ah, your story interests me, madam, pray continue," said Dick Doom.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STOLEN JEWELS.

"THERE is nothing more to tell, sir," said Mrs. Van Vechten, in answer to Dick Doom's request to continue her story.

"Nothing more to tell, madam?"

"Nothing, sir."

"My dear madam, pardon me if I differ with you."

"There is much more to tell."

"I cannot recall what it is," and Mrs. Van Vechten spoke coldly.

"Then permit me to aid you by a few questions, for, as I said, your story interests me, and we must find these lost jewels."

"There is a reward of twenty thousand dollars offered by my husband."

"Then they were valuable?"

"Immensely so."

"Their value, please?"

"My own were worth all of eight thousand dollars, my daughter's half as much, and the others were those we wish to recover, for what belonged to Miss Van Vechten and myself I would give with the reward."

"The others were intrusted to your keeping, you said?"

"Yes, sir."

"And their value?"

"Was one hundred thousand dollars."

Dick Doom did not seem in the least startled by the sum, enormous as it was, but asked:

"Did you get them in Mexico?"

"Yes."

"They were intrusted to you there, you said?"

"Yes, I suppose I must give you all the facts."

"I do not care to act in the dark, madam."

"Well, I have there an old friend, a schoolmate.

"She was a Mexican girl who came to Boston to be educated."

"She married a distinguished Mexican, who was shot as a conspirator against the Government, and her son, a young officer of the army, was suspected of being an ally of his father and was exiled from the country for life."

"The property of his mother was confiscated, but she had managed to hide away the jewels of her family and her husband's."

"It was these that she gave to me, when I visited her there, asking me to have my husband sell them and invest the money for her son, who is in the United States."

"We accepted the trust, and it was supposed by my husband that the robbers had been informed that they were in our possession, and hence attacked us."

"But you brought these jewels from Mexico with you, madam?"

"That we are not sure of; but we put them in my trunk, with our own valuables."

"When did you see them last?"

"The box was in the trunk when I locked it at the hotel, in Vera Cruz."

"Were the jewels in the box?"

"I supposed so, for I had the key."

"And your trunk?"

"Was placed in my state-room, on the steamer, so we never lost sight of it, and we brought it upon the carriage with us when we drove to the hotel."

"How long after did you discover your loss?"

"I did not leave my room to go to dinner, and when my maid opened my trunk, our jewels were gone."

"In dismay I then opened the other box, and they too were gone."

"Had you your key all the time?"

"Yes, until I gave it to my maid."

"Is she French?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long has she been with you?"

"For eight years."

"And your husband's valet?"

"Has been in his employ as long."

"And is French?"

"No, he is English."

"Did they know of these jewels?"

"They knew of mine, but not of the others; but I trust you do not suspect them?"

"I suspect no one, madam."

"But will you, on some pretense, send for your maid, that I may see her?"

"I shall do so, but I resent any suspicion upon her."

"I have not the slightest suspicion against her, madam."

"She is not the thief, but yet I would like to see her."

Mrs. Van Vechten rang for the butler, and he was told to send Jeanette to her.

The maid soon entered, a vivacious, pretty French girl."

"Go to my room, Jeanette, and bring me Miss Ruby's photograph you will find on the table."

The maid obeyed, brought the photograph, and departed.

"Now, madam, the valet of your husband I would see."

He was sent for, and appeared, a sleek-faced Englishman.

"Soho, when Mr. Van Vechten comes home tell him to come to me here, before he goes to his room to dress for dinner."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Has Miss Ruby come back from her drive yet?"

"No, ma'am."

"Tell her also to come here, when she does, as I wish to see her."

"Yes, ma'am."

Then Soho disappeared, and Mrs. Van Vechten said:

"Well, sir, do they look guilty of having robbed us?"

"They are not the thieves, madam."

"You decide quickly, sir."

"When I find the thief, madam, you will discover that your confidence in Jeanette and Soho was not misplaced; but I am glad that you asked to have your husband and daughter come here."

"Ah! you detectives have no heart or mercy, for you look upon every one as guilty until you prove them innocent."

"That is reversing the law, madam; but to be frank I wish to know you all, all who comprised

the party in Mexico, for a look, a word, an action might tell me much that you would not see anything in, and I came here prepared to find that you had taken your own jewels, if suspicion pointed in that direction, Mrs. Van Vechten," and Dick Doom looked calmly serene under Mrs. Van Vechten's look of combined horror and indignation.

CHAPTER V.

PROBING.

"YOU are impudent, sir," cried Mrs. Van Vechten when she could find words to reply to the insinuation of Dick Doom.

"No, madam, I am a detective," was the cool reply.

"And does that give you license, sir, to insinuate—"

"Pardon me, my dear Mrs. Van Vechten, for I insinuated nothing."

"I said that I knew that neither your maid or the valet was the thief, after I had seen them."

"I know that you did not hide your jewels, dispose of them and thus seek to gain more and considerable fame, such as it is."

"I was once called upon to visit a lady who had lost her diamonds."

"They had been stolen from her, she said, by her maid, she felt sure."

"She was a member of the church, gave to charity and stood well with all her acquaintances."

"When I called upon her I heard her story, and saw that she wanted to get rid of a maid who knew too much about her affairs, and so frightened her into running away to avoid arrest."

"I told the lady I would call again, that I could find her diamonds for her."

"My first duty was to find the maid, and I did so."

"Then I called upon the lady and showed her the diamonds."

"She was amazed and wondered how I got them."

"I told her that I had been in a pawnbroker's in Philadelphia when she had come in to get money on those diamonds."

"She had come over from New York for that purpose, and the two thousand dollars reward her husband had offered she intended to use as pin money, claiming to have found the diamonds, but was forced to pay the reward and let the thief go."

"I told her that I had found her maid, forced her to write her a good character and pay to the poor girl the amount of the reward."

"Now, my dear lady, you see I wish to see and know all about these diamonds, and I have yet to meet your husband and daughter."

"Mr. Doom, you are a very remarkable man."

"Thank you, Mrs. Van Vechten. I have been told so before."

"I believe that you will find those jewels."

"And the thief."

"Ah! you suspect some one?"

"Oh, no, not a soul; but you said that your daughter did."

"Do not speak of it, for she is ashamed of what she said."

"May I ask what it was that she said?"

"Well, it was that if she did not know Count Andre Armagnac to be a man of wealth and a gentleman, she would have suspected him, as he alone knew that the jewels were in my trunk."

"Was he ever alone in the room where that trunk was?"

"I think not, and if so, but for a minute."

"A Frenchman, you said, madam?"

"Yes, sir."

"A nobleman?"

"Yes, Count Andre Armagnac."

"Where is he now?"

"In Mexico."

"Will he visit this country?"

"Oh, yes, he is to remain some time in Boston, perhaps make it his home."

"After all he did for us, we invited him to visit us, but he said he would find a home for himself as soon as he came."

"A handsome fellow, doubtless?"

"Yes, a very handsome man, refined, and one who knows the world; but here is my husband."

Mr. Van Vechten entered the room with a quick, firm step, a fine-looking, bronze-faced man with hair just threaded with silver and a dark mustache.

"My husband, Mr. Doom," said Mrs. Van Vechten, at a loss for once to know which to present to the other.

"Mr. Doom, I am glad to meet you."

"You will dine with us of course," said Mr. Van Vechten, in his cordial way.

Mrs. Van Vechten hastened to explain.

"Mr. Richard Doom is—"

"Dick Doom, madam, not Richard—plain Dick," corrected the detective.

Mr. Van Vechten laughed, while Mrs. Van Vechten said coldly:

"Mr. Doom is a detective, Robin, sent by the New York chief of police to hunt for our lost jewels."

"Ah, yes; but detectives are hungry as well as gentlemen of other professions, and I can but repeat my invitation to you, Doom, to dine with us, and we can talk the matter over."

"It has already been discussed, Mr. Van Vechten," said the wife, and the detective soothed her ruffled soul by saying:

"I thank you, Mr. Van Vechten, and you, madam, but I have an engagement to dine with the governor to-day, so must decline."

Mr. Van Vechten gave his wife a smile, and that lady could have kicked herself had it been possible, and the detective, too, for she set him down as a most clever liar.

"I am sorry, Doom, for though you look as solemn as an undertaker, I am sure you can tell a good story; but what can be done about these jewels, for though I have deposited their alleged value, in bank to the credit of the one for whom I was to invest the amount of the jewels, I certainly should like to recover them and it's twenty thousand in your pocket if you find them."

"And the thief?"

"What, do you think more of the thief than the reward?"

"Always, for when I get the thief the reward is sure and the jewels can be found."

"A good reasoner, certainly."

"May I ask if you have deposited that money, or intend to do so?"

Mr. Van Vechten stepped to a mahogany secretary and opening it took out three check-books.

"See here, you see on the stub to credit Ignacio Montello thirty thousand dollars; in this check-book is the same sum to same name, and in this, forty thousand to the same person's credit, all deposited in First National."

"To do this was my first duty upon reaching home, for those jewels were intrusted to my wife's keeping for the gentleman to whom those checks are payable."

"Have you no suspicion of the thief, sir?"

"Not the slightest," was the quick reply.

CHAPTER VI.

A FAVORABLE IMPRESSION.

As Mr. Van Vechten spoke there was the rustle of skirts without and into the room came a young girl who said in the sweetest of voices:

"You wished to see me, mamma?"

"Yes, Ruby, I wished you to meet Mr. Doom, a detective."

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Doom, and congratulate you upon the name you bear as applicable to your profession," and Ruby Van Vechten held out her hand in her frank way, but for some reason the detective did not seem to see it and simply bowed low.

Ruby Van Vechten was a very beautiful girl, that even her rivals admitted.

She was an artist with brush and in music, spoke several languages like her mother tongue, drove a pair of horses most cleverly and rode superbly.

She dressed with exquisite taste after a fashion of her own, never being a slave to the latest style, liked a brilliant man, pitied a bore and flirted just enough to make time pass pleasantly.

She had read all the noted authors and poets, and devoured Dime Novels by the score just because the papers attacked them.

If she had ever fallen in love she kept the secret to herself and not a single gentleman of her acquaintance could boast that he had found more than friendly favor in her eyes.

"Well, Mr. Doom, mamma has told you all about those jewels, I suppose?" she said, dropping her hand gracefully when she saw that the detective had, as she believed, failed to see it.

"I have heard what your mother has to say upon the subject, Miss Van Vechten, and your father has said that he has not the slightest suspicion of any one."

"Have you formed a theory yourself?"

"With the data in my possession it is rather hard to do. But have you?"

"Well, I did make a foolish remark, for which papa and mamma lectured me, and really I should not have made; but the truth was the trunk was never out of sight of the eyes of either

my parents or myself, except upon one occasion."

"May I ask what that occasion was, Miss Van Vechten?"

"I should not say it, perhaps, but I believe in placing you in possession of the full facts of the case, for somehow, why I do not try to explain, I have confidence in your ability to sift this case to the bottom."

"I have the same feeling, Ruby," said Mr. Van Vechten.

"And you will tell me just when that trunk with the jewels was lost sight of, Miss Van Vechten?"

"It was in Vera Cruz, at the hotel there, when a gentleman, to whom we owe deepest gratitude, called upon us just as we were going to dinner."

"He had dined, declined to accompany us, so was asked to await us in our rooms."

"Which he did?"

"Yes, sir, and that is why I made the unkind remark that he was the only one we had trusted with the secret who had been left alone in the room with the trunk."

"That was the Count Andre Armagnac?"

"Yes, mamma has spoken of him, I see."

"Yes, as your rescuer from the Mexican bandits, and a French nobleman of wealth who traveled for pleasure."

"Yes, and a splendid fellow, whom I regret my daughter referred to, Mr. Doom, in connection with this affair, for I have every respect and confidence in the man, and we owe him a larger debt than we can ever pay."

"I should have found out, sir, regarding him, had not Miss Van Vechten or her mother spoken of him."

"May I ask how?"

"I take the steamer, sir, for Vera Cruz tomorrow, and shall go over your route of travel in Mexico, discovering just whom you met there."

"And your expenses?"

"I shall pay them, sir."

"And you will do this, Mr. Doom, in the hope of getting the large reward I have offered?"

"No, sir."

"Why, then, may I ask?"

"To get the thief, sir!" was the response of Dick Doom.

"You are aware of the value of these jewels, sir?" asked Ruby.

"Yes, Miss Van Vechten."

"And that mother's loss and mine was also heavy?"

"I have been told so."

"And father offers twenty thousand dollars for the return of the jewels?"

"Yes, and not a dollar for the thief, yet it is he that I am after."

"You suspect a man?"

"I suspect no one, now that I have met your parents, yourself, your maid and the valet, Miss Van Vechten."

"Then we were, some of us, under suspicion before you met us?" asked Ruby, with a smile, while her father laughed.

"Whatever might have been my suspicion before meeting you, after doing so I have none," was the reply.

"Have you a clew?" persisted Ruby.

"Not the slightest."

"Then I cannot see how you can find any trace to work on."

"And yet I believe that I will catch the thief, and restore the jewels, Miss Van Vechten."

"Do so, Doom, and I'll put another five thousand to that reward," Mr. Van Vechten said, earnestly.

"It is the thief, sir, not the reward, I am after," was the reply, and Dick Doom arose and took his leave, again declining the invitation of Mr. Van Vechten to dinner, and which was seconded now by Mrs. Van Vechten and Ruby.

Taking his departure from the Van Vechten mansion, Dick Doom walked down to the steamer and paid his passage to Havana, from whence he would catch another vessel to Vera Cruz.

And behind him he left three persons who variously commented upon him, and by no means to his detriment.

"Somewhere I have met that man before, and somehow I have the utmost confidence in his ability to find those jewels," said Mr. Van Vechten.

"And I feel the same way, Robin," was Mrs. Van Vechten's answer.

"And I feel that he will run down the thief, for I saw enough of Mr. Dick Doom to know that he bears a fatal name for felons," was Ruby's characteristic comment upon the detective.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO LETTERS.

DICK DOOM went from the steamer to his hotel, and found there some mail awaiting him.

He began to pace up and down the room, as was his wont when in deep thought.

He still wore his gray wig and glasses, and they completely disguised him, for they took away the idea that he was a young and handsome youth.

"Well, that was an ordeal for me to-day to pass through, and I accept the work of finding the thief, with a determination to win, to track down that thief."

"How beautiful she has grown; I do not wonder that men love her, for how can they help it."

"Before going there I felt that I would find the thief in the valet or the maid; but no, they are innocent."

"No woman would steal all those jewels and a man would not dare do so, not a man in the position of a valet."

"I must look elsewhere for the thief."

"Now to see what these two letters say, for one is from the New Orleans chief, the other from New York's chief of police."

He opened the one from New York first, and read as follows:

"MY DEAR DOOM:—

"A detective I had down upon the Texas border has just returned and reports to me that a man, answering the description of Valentine Gibson, crossed into Mexico at Laredo, along with one other about his size and not unlike him in face.

"They might or might not have been Gibson and his pretended clerical friend; but I give you the information for what it is worth."

"In regard to the Van Vechten jewels, I wish to say that I have seen the captain, stewardess and steward of the steamer upon which the family came from Vera Cruz, and they had state-rooms which could only be opened with a pass-key, and but one is allowed on board, so that no thief could have entered in their absence."

"My idea is that the jewels were stolen in Mexico before their departure, and your going there will doubtless result in some discovery."

"I wish you every success, and if I can serve you command me."

The other letter was from Dick Doom's old-time friend, the New Orleans chief, and was as follows:

"MY DEAR DICK:—

"Every instruction sent me by you has been complied with, and with the following results:

"In the first place my detectives have discovered that about the time of Gibson's escape a brig sailed from this port bound to Galveston, and a boatman carried off two men just as the anchor was being gotten up."

"This boatman I have seen and he states the men wore heavy cloaks, as it was raining, and were about the same size and build."

"I wired the Galveston chief and received in answer:

"Brig Rainbow left New Orleans night stated, arrived here after short run and is reloading."

"Captain states that he brought two passengers, who hailed a fishing-smack off port and arranged with him to take them to Corpus Christi."

"The description of the men tallies with that sent me of the escaped prisoner and his accomplice."

"I then wired Corpus Christi and learn that a coaster landed two men answering description of Gibson and his rescuer, and they were taken on board at sea from Galveston fishing-boat."

"They arrived at night, bought horses, secured guide and started for San Diego."

"A dispatch from that place said that guide had returned that far, having put men across the Rio Grande at Laredo."

"Ah! that is where the detective of the New York chief saw them cross," said Dick Doom.

"This really begins to look as though I was on the right track."

Then he resumed his letter:

"Now I am glad you suggested tracking them from New Orleans, for I believe those are the two men you seek, and with the information you now have I suppose you will pick up their trail at Laredo."

"Do not hesitate to call upon me in any way that I can serve you."

Then followed a long P.S. which read:

"I have just gotten my first clew as to who the unknown woman is who was such a marked feature of the Gibson trial."

"You remember that I wrote you that she was heavily veiled, handsomely dressed and drove to the court-house every day in a carriage."

"She stopped in private quarters here, renting her rooms and paying liberally for all she got."

"She had her meals served in her rooms, and was all alone."

"The day after Gibson's sentence she left, taking an up-river boat, but she returned within a week, secured other quarters, and left them the night of Gibson's escape, so your theory is right, that a woman plotted his rescue, and that woman was the unknown veiled lady of the trial."

"I do know that she tried to reach the jury

with a bribe, through a man about the court, and failed.

"She is said to be young and beautiful, and the two who were her landlords here state that she was most liberally supplied with money.

"I can find no such woman whom Gibson knew here, so she must be some friend of his earlier life.

"When she last left the city it was by a steamer to Louisville, but the captain says that she left at Vicksburg."

"If I do not find Gibson in Mexico, then I will have to look up that veiled lady of the trial," said Dick Doom when he had finished reading his letter.

The next day he sailed southward upon his double mission to find the escaped murderer and the lost jewels.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE MEXICAN TRAIL.

"SEÑOR, I wish to have a talk with you."

The speaker was Dick Doom, but he was not in the same disguise which he had worn when he had made his visit at the Van Vechten mansion.

Now he was attired as his natural self, wearing no disguise whatever.

He was in a hotel in Vera Cruz, and the one he spoke to was the landlord, an American long resident in Mexico.

"I am wholly at your service, sir," he responded, and he followed the young detective to his room.

"You may recall my passing through Vera Cruz some time ago?" began Dick Doom.

"I do, señor, for I procured horses and a guide for you, as you said you were on the search for some parties whom you were most anxious to find."

"You recall me, I see; but I wish to tell you that I made the trip to Laredo, and have discovered that one of the parties I seek was killed on the road some months ago by Mexican bandits."

"Yes, señor."

"He was buried where he fell, along with a coachman of a traveling party and a couple of bandits who were also slain at the time."

"Yes, señor."

"One who was not killed, who came to the rescue of the traveling party, came on with those whom he had served so well, and put up at your hotel."

"I think I recall the party now, señor; they were Americans from Boston, and stopped here a couple of weeks awaiting the sailing of the steamer."

"That is the party, a gentleman, his wife, daughter—"

"A most beautiful girl, señor."

Unheeding the interruption Dick Doom continued:

"And two servants, a ladies' maid and a valet."

"That is the party, señor."

"There was a gentleman with them?"

"Yes, señor."

"Do you recall his name?"

"Yes, señor, it was Count Andre Armagnac."

"Where is he now?"

"Senor, he is dead."

"Dead?" and in spite of himself the detective started.

"Yes, señor."

"Will you give me the particulars of his death?"

"Certainly, señor, he was killed in a duel."

"Killed in a duel?"

"So it was, señor, with a wild young Mexican ranchero, with whom he got into a quarrel over a game of cards."

"The Mexican was to blame, from all I can learn of the affair, and tried to cheat the Frenchman, who accused him of his act and a duel followed."

"And the Frenchman was killed?"

"Yes, señor, he was shot through the head at the first fire, though he also wounded the Mexican, who is still confined to his bed."

"The matter was hushed up, on account of the Mexican's family, and they had the Frenchman decently buried, sending his effects to me."

"And you have them?"

"Yes, señor, for he was stopping with me at the time, and had been ever since he came here with the Boston family, except when he ran off for a few days' hunt, or pleasure trip."

"Senor, I will show you my authority for asking what I do, and will tell you that I have reason to believe that the one whom you say was shot in a duel was the man I seek."

"Indeed, señor?"

"I am a detective, and came to Mexico upon the track of an escaped prisoner."

"My search thus far has proven that he was either the man who was killed in the attack upon the bandits, in rescuing the Van Vechten, or he is the man who claimed to be Count Andre Armagnac, who was killed in a duel."

"In either case, señor, he is beyond your reach."

"Yes, for death has anticipated me."

"But, by looking over the effects of the man who was your boarder, and whom you knew as Count Andre Armagnac, I can discover whether he was really the count, or the man killed back on the trail was my man."

"I cannot dispute your authority, carrying the papers you do, señor, and wearing the badges of your office, so I will show you to the count's room, which is as he left it, and which I have not disturbed, expecting as I do the arrival of his brother from France, for I wrote to him at once after the death of the count, as in duty bound."

"Yes, you did right, señor; but have you heard from him?"

"I have, señor."

"The count gave me the address of his brother, his only living relative, he said, and the keys of his room and trunks, before going out to fight the duel."

"I at once went to see about his burial, but was told that the family of his foe had had the body coffined and placed in their vault, to await directions from the count's kinsman."

"And your letter from the brother?"

"In it he stated he would be here as soon as he could arrange to come, but it would not be for some months yet."

"Where was this letter dated?"

"From Paris, señor."

"You shall see it," and the landlord led the way to the count's room.

They were pleasant quarters, a sitting-room and bed-chamber, and about them was an air of luxury.

A massive meerschaum pipe of the head of Napoleon the First was upon a table with a silk tobacco pouch having embroidered upon it a coat of arms.

There was a traveling case, iron-bound, and a heavy leather trunk.

A pair of foils, boxing-gloves, wire masks, a sword, riding-boots, spurs and several hunting suits, with other clothing, hats, leggings, a dressing gown and smoking-cap, and slippers were scattered about the two rooms, while upon a table were a number of foreign photographs.

"I am on the wrong track as far as this man having been Valentine Gibson."

"No, Gibson was the man killed in the attack upon the bandits, and the count was his rescuer and traveling companion."

"I cannot get at the bottom of this," and Dick Doom wore an anxious look.

CHAPTER IX.

AT FAULT.

IT was evident that Dick Doom for once was off the trail.

He was anxious, for, just as he felt he had tracked his man Gibson and found in Count Armagnac the jewel-thief, he discovered that one had been killed in the attack upon the bandits and the other had lost his life in a duel with a young Mexican.

He had found out that the two men, Gibson and the count, for they could be no other, had left New Orleans together on the brig Rainbow, had been transferred to a fishing-smack off Galveston, run into Corpus Christi upon a coaster, and gone overland with a guide to Laredo, where they had crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico.

They had then journeyed on horseback through Mexico, come upon the bandits attacking the Van Vechten party, had dashed to the rescue and Gibson had lost his life.

The count had joined the party and gone on to Vera Cruz with them.

He had spoken of his friend who had been killed as a gentleman to whom he owed his life.

He was an American, he said, whom he had persuaded to join him on his trip to Mexico, but more than that, he had once saved his life, and he had known him in New Orleans; he knew little of him.

The landlord said that he had once heard him speak of his dead friend as Valentine, and he stated that he had been traveling light as far as baggage went, while the few hundreds in money which he had, the count, who had been paying all expenses, took from the body, and went back from the first ranch where the party made a halt and buried it decently, as also the other bodies.

The count's baggage had been sent by steamer to Vera Cruz, but nothing belonging to his friend had come at the same time.

Most attentively did Dick Doom listen to all the landlord had to tell, and then the two decided to open the packing-case and trunk, and look through them, for the detective told him of the stolen jewels.

"If the count did take them, and I cannot believe such a thing possible of him, señor, then they will be found in his trunks, for he knew no one here, and never went out of the hotel until just before his duel, when he made the acquaintance of that fast young Mexican who killed him."

"But we will soon know," and the landlord opened the trunks.

They contained the outfitting of a traveler, one who had roamed through foreign lands, picking up here and there a few souvenirs of more or less value.

There was in the leather trunk an inner case securely locked, and herein were some valuables, jewelry and money, the latter amounting to about a thousand dollars in American gold.

The jewelry consisted of various sets of studs, sleeve-buttons, a couple of watches, several chains and scarf-pins.

There was not a trace of feminine jewelry in the lot, but besides the money was a leather case with several letters of credit.

"Well, señor, you have seen all that the count has left, and here are the articles he had with him when killed, his watch and jewelry, with his pocket-book containing money."

"I reserve all for the coming of his brother who will inherit his title and estates, he told me."

"Yes, I am at a loss, I frankly admit, to see my way clear."

"I am sure that the count did not take the Van Vechten jewels."

"Of that fact there can be no doubt."

"I am also sure that the man I was looking for was rescued by the count, was killed, as stated, and that he could not have been the thief, as he met his death before he knew that Mrs. Van Vechten had the jewels in her possession."

"The question now is who did take those jewels, and you must help me to find out if it was done in your hotel."

"If not, then they were taken upon the steamer on the way to New York."

The landlord did all in his power to trace the stolen jewels but in vain.

Every one who might be suspected was watched, and every place where jewels might have been pawned or sold, was visited.

The chief of police in the City of Mexico was communicated with, and a search was made to discover if any jewels had been sold or pawned there.

But the report was that none had been.

So at last Dick Doom decided to take the steamer for New York, engage the state-room occupied by Mrs. Van Vechten, and see if he could get a clew from a close watch upon the people on the vessel.

Before going, however, he wrote the following letter to the New Orleans chief of police:

"I have discovered that the two men sailing upon the Rainbow were Valentine Gibson and his rescuer."

"They left the fishing-smack off Galveston, changed to a coaster and landed at Corpus Christi, taking horses and a guide into Mexico, crossing at Laredo."

"They went to the rescue of the Van Vechten family, of whom I wrote you, and Gibson was killed."

"I went to the spot and saw his grave."

"His companion, Count Andre Armagnac joined the Van Vechten party, and was left by them at Vera Cruz, where he was killed in a duel with a dissolute young Mexican."

"His effects are here awaiting his brother's coming."

"Now who was Count Andre Armagnac, where did he stop in New Orleans, and why did he rescue a felon from prison, are questions I should like answered."

"I sail for New York by steamer to-morrow."

"Please address me there as before."

"For once I am bewildered on a trail, for I can find no clew to those lost jewels."

"Don't fail to post me about the count, and let me know all else you can about the Veiled Lady who was Gibson's friend."

Yours,

"DICK DOOM."

CHAPTER X.

TRACKED.

THE run to New York on the steamer was devoid of success, upon the part of Dick Doom.

He occupied the state-room which had been Mrs. Van Vechten's, and with his own skeleton

keys, which he had never known fail him before, he was unable to open the door leading into it.

The pass-key was an odd one, indeed, and that one alone would open the state-room door.

This was proof that the trunk had not been robbed upon the steamer, for after getting into the room a thief would have had to unstrap the trunk, spring the clasps, and then unlock it with two separate keys, an impossibility under the circumstances.

Then, too, the jewel-cases in the trunk were both locked, and these trays would have to be removed to get at them, Mrs. Van Vechten had said.

When he arrived in New York Dick Doom went at once to Police Headquarters.

A secret badge he wore admitted him to the presence of the chief, who warmly greeted him.

"Back from Mexico, Dick, and I hope with good news."

"No, sir, on the contrary, I am foiled at every turn."

"Tell me about it, for to foil you a man must be playing the cleverest of games."

"Death foiled me in one instance, and in the other I am absolutely unable to find any trace of these lost Van Vechten jewels, or of the thief that got them."

"This is remarkable in your case; but let me hear your story."

The story was told from beginning to end, and then the chief said:

"Well, Gibson has cheated the gallows, that is certain, and strange, too, he died in doing a good act."

"The count had a good influence over him, at least."

"Oh, that was Gibson's way, for he was full of pluck, and always placing some one under a favor to him."

"But, let me see what the New Orleans chief says," and he picked up the letter which had come for him.

"*MY DEAR DICK,*" ran the letter:—
"I received yours from Vera Cruz, and at once put every good man I have on the work you suggested."

"Count Andre Armagnac is a *bona fide* character, and came to this city from up the river where he had been visiting."

"He stopped at the St. Charles and had the best of quarters, and, contrary to most counts, paid his bills."

"He left the St. Charles the night of Gibson's escape, his baggage having been sent to the Vera Cruz steamer, and it was supposed that he had gone that way himself."

"The steamer is in port and the captain said the count engaged passage, his baggage was put in his room, but when about to sail he got a note from him saying he would not go by the steamer, but to leave his traps at the best hotel in Vera Cruz to await his coming."

"A hackman has been found who drove the count down to the river, where he left him, apparently awaiting for some one, and this is conclusive proof that he was Gibson's rescuer, so that upsets your theory of a woman in the case."

"The count met Gibson away from New Orleans somewhere, and the two were friends before the man was brought back here a criminal by you."

"The count was heard to speak of a friend of his in Mississippi, a planter who had met him abroad, and he was the one whom he visited near Natchez."

"He spoke of him as his friend Brandon Branch, and I at once went myself in search of the party of that name."

"I found that Mr. Branch was a young man of wealth, living upon his plantation in a fine old mansion."

"He had been educated in Europe and there met the count."

"The planter lived there with his sister, of whom I obtained a photograph, which I send you, and which I must confess I took without leave or license."

"Mr. Branch had gone to Europe for an indefinite stay, and his sister, the old servants told me, had gone to visit relatives in the North, where I could not find out."

"The servants also told me that they knew Mr. Gibson, that he had saved the life of Miss Branch when the steamer Prince burned up some two years ago."

"I further learned that Mr. Branch had gone to Europe before you brought Gibson back a prisoner, and when his trial was going on she had not been at home, having gone to New Orleans, the old negro auntie said, on account of something she had seen in the papers, and which had distressed her a heap."

"This accounts for the *Vailed Lady* of the court, but was the count her ally, or her slave in the matter of the rescue."

"If either, I have to retract and say that you were right in saying that the fine hand of a woman was at the bottom of it all."

"In return for her life, saved from the burning steamer, she saved Gibson from the gallows."

"The old auntie also told me that the count had been visiting there just before the master went to

Europe, and it was her, auntie's, impression that Miss Fidele, for such was her name, had refused the nobleman's offer of marriage.

"This complicates matters that much more in his rescue of his rival, for auntie felt sure, she said, that Miss Fidele loved the young man who saved her life.

"Now you have the facts of the case, as you wished them, so you see my ferrets did the work well."

"The brother and sister are certainly very rich, and I would not be surprised if the former was miffed with Miss Fidele because she would not accept his friend the count."

"This is merely an idea of my own."

"As I was about to leave, auntie's husband returned from the village post-office with a letter for her."

"It was plainly written and from Miss Branch, dated in Boston, at the Tremont House, so she will be within the field of your work, if you continue your search for the missing jewels, and I do not believe you are the man to give up a trail you have once started on."

"Now, Dick, you know who the *Vailed Lady* is, and so the trails connect with the one you followed through Mexico."

"The count's fate was a sad one, and I regret that Gibson met one he did not deserve, thus cheating the gallows."

"I have not yet let his fate be known to the public."

"Hoping you may find the Van Vechten jewels, believe me as ever, etc."

"Well, Dick, you were right about a woman being at the bottom of Gibson's escape," said the New York chief, when Dick Doom finished reading the letter.

"Yes, sir, and it was unfortunate that she loved such a wretch as was Gibson."

"You think that she loved him then?"

"She had no other motive for saving him from the gallows."

"And the count's part in that rescue?"

"I will know all when I meet the *Vailed Lady*, sir."

"Then you will see her?"

"Yes, sir, I shall go to Boston to-night," was the response, and as the chief handed back the photograph which had been sent, he said:

"Beware, for she is a very beautiful woman, Dick, and a dangerous one, too."

CHAPTER XI.

THE RETURN.

MRS. VAN VECHTEN went into the parlor to receive a visitor.

The card had come up to her bearing the name:

"MISS RICHARDS."

Mrs. Van Vechten had no such acquaintance, but she supposed it was some worthy person, so went down to see her.

She found an old maid with corkscrew curls, a bonnet of ancient date, a long-waisted silk dress and a shawl.

The lady wore glasses and had a smirk.

"You don't know me, ma'am, but I made bold to call, as I had a little mate of business with you," said Miss Richards.

"Please let me know how I can serve you?" said Mrs. Van Vechten coldly, for she felt that her visitor would develop into a bore.

"Well, ma'am, I've come to make a report to you, and you must excuse me for not coming as Dick Doom, for that person must not be known in Boston."

"Where is Mr. Doom, Miss Richards?"

"Before you, Mrs. Van Vechten."

The lady started back in amazement while she said in a whisper:

"Are you Detective Doom?"

"I am, madam, and as I am not to be known by that name in Boston, you will pardon me for coming in this disguise."

"Certainly, sir, you know your business best."

"But I supposed you were in Mexico."

"I returned from there several days ago."

"And your trip there was unsuccessful?"

"You read well, madam, for in one respect I met with no success, yet in another case I succeeded."

"You did not find those lost jewels?"

"No, madam."

"I feared it, and I feel deeply your lack of success, sir."

"I admit, madam, even to a man of Mr. Van Vechten's wealth a hundred thousand dollars is a very large sum to lose."

"It is not that, for the money we could readily spare."

"But the Senor Ignacio Montello has been here."

"Ah!"

"And he states that in that jewelry were secret slides containing important papers, worth half a million or more to him, while if found by

those who would betray their contents it would cause his mother to be imprisoned for life, and a requisition to be made by Mexico upon the United States for himself, and which would end in his being put to death."

"They are indeed fatal jewels, madam."

"Yes, and when the Senora Montello asked my husband to dispose of them and invest the money for her son, she gave him written instructions to first separate the gems from the gold settings, and give to her son what he found."

"This paper, with his imperfect knowledge of Spanish he did not understand until my daughter translated it for him a short while since."

"You see then, sir, that the gems are worth five times the value stated, and that the setting holds a deadly secret."

"Yes, madam, I see it all."

"And now the Senor Montello has gone into hiding, fearing the discovery of his secret, through the jewels, may set the officers of the law upon him at any time—ah! what have I done, for you are a detective."

"Yes, madam, one with honor, permit me to say, so that your secret is safe, for in looking for the lost jewels for you, I have no right to wrong others whose secrets I may discover, unless they should be the ones who committed the theft."

"I thank you, sir, and feel that my confidence in you will not be misplaced."

"Now may I ask you what discovery you made in Mexico?"

"I received information, madam, which led me to feel that an escaped prisoner, one under sentence of death, by hanging, in New Orleans, had gone to Mexico."

"He attached himself, as a traveling companion, to Count Andre Armagnac, and in going to your rescue it was the escaped prisoner who was killed."

"Ah! did the count know the character of this man?" quickly asked Mrs. Van Vechten.

"I cannot answer your question, madam," was the evasive reply, for Dick Doom did not care to say aught against the count to the Van Vechtens, especially as he felt that what he had done to rescue Gibson had been from some motive which no one had a right to judge him by without knowing the full facts of the case.

Mrs. Van Vechten took it just as Dick Doom intended she should, that the count had been ignorant of who and what Gibson really was.

"Having made this discovery, madam, and gone to the scene of the bandits' attack on you, and seen the graves of those slain, I returned to Vera Cruz."

"How wonderful are the workings of you detectives; you are properly called the hounds of the law."

"But did you meet Count Armagnac in Vera Cruz?"

"I did not, madam."

"He had left there before your arrival?"

"He had gone on his last long journey, I regret to tell you, Mrs. Van Vechten," said Dick Doom, impressively.

"You do not, cannot mean that he is dead?" said Mrs. Van Vechten, with a choking sensation in the throat.

"Yes, Mrs. Van Vechten, the count was killed in a duel with a young Mexican, some time before my arrival in Vera Cruz."

"Killed in a duel?"

"How terrible, how sad."

"I liked that young man very much, Mr. Doom, for he won his way into our favor by his risking his life to save us, as he did."

"I deeply deplore his sad end, and I feel that my husband and daughter will also deeply regret the sad tidings you bring."

"You must tell us all about it, Mr. Doom, for here come Mr. Van Vechten and my daughter," and the lady brushed an honest tear away from her eyes as she spoke.

CHAPTER XII.

STILL ON THE TRACK.

"MR. DOOM? where is Mr. Doom, wife?" said Mr. Van Vechten, who had just returned from a horseback ride with his daughter, and saw only the old maid talking to his wife.

"I am sailing under false colors, sir, as Miss Richards; and your wife having pardoned the offense I trust your daughter and yourself will do the same."

"Doom it is as I live, and in an old maid's petticoats."

"No one on earth would ever know you, Mr. Doom, take my word for it."

"Would you recognize him, Ruby?"

"I cannot understand how a man can play the woman so well, Mr. Doom."

"May I ask which is your real character, as we saw you before, or as we see you now?"

"My real character, Miss Van Vechten, is so often hidden by disguises that I am always just what you see me."

"At present I am Miss Richards."

"And Mr. Doom has just returned from Mexico," said Mrs. Van Vechten, softly.

"Ah! and what luck, Doom?"

"I have been telling Mrs. Van Vechten, sir, that I failed to find the jewels there, though I did accomplish much by my going, from my standpoint."

"So you have given up finding the jewels?"

"Oh, no, sir, on the contrary I am more than ever determined to find them."

"Those jewels never came out of Mexico, Doom."

"And yet, sir; I have come to Boston to search for them."

"Ah! then you have some clew?"

"An imaginary one, sir, and one which will cause me to make the hunt in Boston."

"This is strange; but you know your business, for when in New York last week I called upon the chief of police, and he gave you a record you would feel proud of did you hear it."

"I took a side bet with him of five hundred that you would not find the jewels."

"I must not let the chief lose his money, sir, for he is not a rich man."

"Mr. Doom brings us bad news from Mexico, Robin," ventured Mrs. Van Vechten.

"Indeed!" was the inquiring response, and Ruby turned quickly for an explanation.

"First, sir, let me say that the Count Andre Armagnac was not the one who took those jewels."

"I never believed it of him, and it was my daughter's unfortunate remark that cast the shadow of a suspicion upon him."

"You met him, then?"

"No, sir, for I am sorry to tell you that Count Armagnac was killed in a duel with a young Mexican very soon after your departure," and Dick Doom kept his eyes, as he uttered the words, upon the beautiful face of Ruby Van Vechten.

He saw her start, turn slightly pale, and then came her honest words:

"Indeed am I sorry that a thoughtless remark of mine should have wronged poor Count Armagnac."

"Poor Armagnac dead?" said Mr. Van Vechten, while, unheeding the remark, Dick Doom answered Ruby's words:

"You did wrong him, Miss Van Vechten, for, with the landlord of the hotel I went over all of his effects."

"I saw his own jewel-case, his money, his letters of credit and all, and had he taken these jewels they would have been in his trunk, or there would have been some proof that he had tried to get rid of them."

"There was none, and I heard the whole story from the landlord, of the duel, of his writing to the count's brother and the letter he read in answer stating that he would soon arrive in Vera Cruz to take charge of his brother's effects."

"The landlord made an inventory of all, in my presence, and the effects will be delivered over to his brother Henri, who inherits the title and estate of Count Andre."

"Tell us of this duel, Mr. Doom," said Mr. Van Vechten, who seemed to greatly deplore the untimely end of the man to whom they were under such deep obligations.

"The quarrel was over a game of cards, sir, the count having met the Mexican in the hotel."

"He was being cheated, accused the Mexican of being a card-sharp and was challenged by him."

"He accepted, fought with revolvers and the count fell dead, though he wounded his adversary, who was an unworthy son of a fine old family."

"I went to see this young Mexican, whose name is Nunez De Soto."

"I found him not so badly wounded as was supposed, for he was feigning, to avoid prosecution, I think, intending to escape as soon as he was able to do so, in my opinion."

"But he has a certain swing of power and I do not think will be even arrested, though the better class of the people condemn him severely for having forced the count into a duel with him."

"Having discovered that an escaped prisoner I sought was the count's friend, and in their rescue of you was the man who was killed, and after assuring myself that Mexico was not the place to look for those jewels, I took the steamer for New York, occupying your state-room, Mrs. Van Vechten, on the way, and thus assuring

myself that the theft had not been committed on board ship."

"One moment, Mr. Doom?"

"Yes, Miss Van Vechten?"

"What was the count doing with a friend who was an escaped prisoner?"

"A traveling companion doubtless, Miss Van Vechten, met upon the way and who joined forces with the count for their mutual protection."

"Yes, that was doubtless the case, for the count had little to say regarding him I remember," Mrs. Van Vechten remarked, and soon after Miss Richards took her leave, while Ruby Van Vechten said:

"Father, that man knows more than he has told us."

"He is as deep as the sea."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GOLD STAR.

THE first act of Dick Doom, upon arriving in Boston, was to seek for himself quarters.

He seemed to know the city pretty thoroughly, and at last secured rooms in a large building fronting the common, the calling of its occupants being most diversified.

There were a couple of front entrances to the building, one on a side street and a fourth in the rear on a court.

A restaurant, milliner, dressmaker, tailor, dentist, doctor, artist and French teacher were among the occupants, several of whom lived there as well as had their business interests there.

Dick Doom went there as an engraver, took three rooms upon the top floor and which was the best suite of apartments in the building.

He had a large sitting-room handsomely furnished, a bedroom adjoining and a smaller room next to that.

He proceeded to make himself at home, unpacked his trunks, for he had no less than five, put his books, bric-a-brac and other articles out to make his quarters attractive, and put at his own expense locks upon the doors which no keys could unlock excepting those in his possession.

He told the janitress that he was his own housekeeper, as he could not afford to have his work disturbed, and that he always looked after his own quarters.

It was from this place that he sallied forth as "Miss Richards" to see Mrs. Van Vechten, and here he returned after his visit.

Soon after a man left his quarters in clerical dress, white tie, high hat, spectacles and cane.

He made his way to the office of the Boston chief of police and sent his card in, requesting an interview.

The card he sent in read:

"REV. AMOS SLYGH."

The chief, a stern-faced man, gentlemanly in deportment and who had an eye like an eagle, greeted him as he came in with a look which seemed to see through him.

"May I ask, sir, why I am honored with a visit from the Reverend Amos Slygh?" said the chief, glancing at the card and asking the question when the visitor seemed in no hurry to speak.

"I am on the track of wicked men, sir," was the sepulchral reply.

"Then you have gotten out of your bearings in coming here."

"I thought that the Police Headquarters was the place to find criminals."

"You are mistaken, sir, for this is the place to start out in search of them."

"Ah! then you are just the one I seek, for I am on a still hunt."

"Read my petition, please."

"I have no time, sir, to look at petitions just now."

"I beg of you to read the first few lines," and a couple of letters were handed over to the chief who after a quick glance said:

"Hai! what is this? A letter from my friend the New York chief, yes and another from the New Orleans head of the police force, and introducing to my notice Dick Doom, Detective."

"Yes, sir."

"Where is this Dick Doom, for I have heard much of him?"

"I am Dick Doom, sir."

"You! why, you are— By heaven! but these letters state that you would take me in, and you have done it."

"Come, are you in disguise, or as your natural self?"

"In disguise, sir."

"What are you when you are yourself?"

"Dick Doom, sir."

"Well, Mr. Doom, I am very happy to make your acquaintance, and though I do not yet know you well, I will say that any man who has the two letters you gave to me just now, ought to be very proud of his career as a detective."

"Sit down, my dear sir, and say just how I can serve you?"

"Thank you, sir."

"But I am here upon a very important mission."

"Can I serve you in it?"

"Yes, sir, though I hope not to give you much trouble."

"It will be a pleasure, sir, I assure you."

"You heard, sir, of the escape of Valentine Gibson from New Orleans, just before the date set for his hanging?"

"Yes, and a very remarkable and clever escape that was."

"I have looked with suspicion upon preachers ever since, and that is why I kept my weather eye so sharply upon you."

Dick Doom laughed and replied:

"Well, sir, as I dogged Gibson to the gallows, I naturally wished to recapture him, and so have thus far, permit me in confidence to tell you, tracked him to his grave."

"You had to kill him?"

"Oh, no, sir, but he was killed, and while doing a good act, so that ends his career."

"Yes, but the public are in ignorance of his fate."

"And will be so kept for some time, sir; but I came to Boston upon another purpose."

"Yes?"

"You are acquainted with the Van Vechtens, I suppose, sir?"

"I know them, yes, and splendid people they are."

"Mr. Van Vechten is now offering a very large reward for some jewels his wife and daughter lost, some months since."

"Have you any clew to the jewels, sir?"

"Not the slightest."

"Or the thief?"

"Our every effort has been baffled."

"Have you any theory?"

"A dozen, but they were wrong."

"Well, chief, I have come here to find those jewels."

"They are supposed to have been taken in Mexico or New York."

"Yes, but I shall search for them here, sir, and what I ask of you, chief, is a badge to protect me and command obedience from your officers and detectives should I need their services."

"You shall have the gold star which my police captains wear, and with it my secret badge, bearing my monogram and the word obey."

"You certainly are most kind, sir."

"And, Mr. Doom, as you are in disguise, and I so consider it your wish to remain, I'll have you see my secret officers, so that you will remember their faces, if you meet them again."

"I will be glad to have a look at them, chief, for I have the faculty of never forgetting a face."

The Secret Service Four was then called in review, the chief offering as an excuse:

"Now, Reverend Sir, see if you can pick the man out from among those who pass before you."

The supposed parson took the men in most critically, dwelling one instant longer upon some face than upon the others, and causing some of the detectives to grow a trifle nervous under his glance.

"I will remember any face that I saw in that line, sir, and I thank you."

"Now let me tell you, and it is for you alone, where I am to be found," and he gave the chief a card upon which was written:

"GEORGE AVERY,

"Engraver on Steel and Wood."

"You can address me at this address, sir, or seek me there, for I have taken rooms there, and will be glad to see you at any time."

"I shall look in upon you, Mr. Doom; but I hope to have you drop in here whenever you feel so inclined."

"I will do so, thank you."

"Now have you any clew as to those Van Vechten jewels?"

"None, sir, but I am on the hunt," and soon after Dick Doom took his leave of the chief.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DETECTIVE NONPLUSED.

FROM the office of the chief of police Dick Doom, in his clerical disguise, made his way to the Tremont Hotel.

He did not ask the way, appearing to know the crooked streets of the city perfectly.

He glanced over the register and his finger halted at a name.

It was:

"MISS FIDELE BRANCH,
Mississippi."

"Is this lady here, sir?"

"No, sir," answered the clerk.

"When did she leave, please?"

The clerk looked at his books and gave the date.

"Do you know where she went?"

"I do not, sir."

"May I ask if she left the hotel in a carriage?"

"Yes, sir, a carriage was ordered for her."

"I would like to find the coachman who drove her, sir."

"It was a hack from the stand, and if you go and ask the different drivers you may be able to ascertain."

Thanking the clerk Dick Doom left the hotel, and sought the hack-stand.

He found the driver who had taken Miss Branch away.

She had been driven to the Star of the East, the Kennebec steamer.

"Had she any baggage?"

"Yes, sir, two trunks."

"Drive me to the steamer."

Arriving at the steamer Dick Doom found no lady of the name of Branch had taken passage on the date named.

The steward recalled the fact, aided by a dollar, that a lady had come there in a hack, and her trunks had been taken on board.

She had not gone to the office, and without doing so called another hack and drove away with her baggage.

"Do you know the hack?"

"Yes, sir, for I called it for her, and I know the man well who drives it."

"Find him for me," and a silver dollar was slipped into the steward's hand.

It was quite a long wait, but soon the steward came down to the wharf seated on the box of a hack with the driver.

"This is the man, sir."

"You drove a young lady from here on such a date, with her baggage?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you take her?"

"I disremember the number, sir, but I can drive you to the house."

"Do so."

Entering the hack Dick Doom was rolled rapidly away upon a long drive to a fashionable quarter of the town.

The hack soon drew rein before a large, double flat house.

Dick Doom alighted, glanced over the cards under the bells and read in one:

MISS BRANCH."

He rung the bell, the door opened and he ascended the stairs to the top floor.

He rung the bell of the flat and the door opened revealing a woman of middle age, neatly dressed, but evidently a servant.

"I wish to see Miss Branch, please."

"Have yez a card, sir?"

"Say that the Reverend Mr. Slygh requests an interview with Miss Branch."

The woman disappeared, but soon returned and ushered the visitor into a handsomely furnished room.

A moment after Miss Branch entered, and Dick Doom started, and asked:

"Is this Miss Branch?"

"It is, sir."

Dick Doom was taken aback, for the one who entered had snow-white hair, combed down on each side of her temples, wore a pretty lace cap, was dressed in black, with a snowy ruching about her neck, and was the very picture of a handsome, contented old maid.

"Pardon me, madam, but I think there is some mistake, for it was doubtless your daughter I wished to see."

"I have no daughter, sir."

"I am an unmarried woman."

"Pardon me, then perhaps it was your niece."

"I have no niece, sir."

"Again, I beg pardon; but the lady I wished to see was young," and Dick Doom very nearly said, "and very beautiful," but did not, in spite of his embarrassment at having made a mistake.

"Her name was Miss Fidele Branch."

"I, sir, am Miss Faithful Branch, and as your call was not intended for me, I must ask you to excuse me."

Dick Doom bowed and responded:

"I beg pardon for my mistake, madam."

"Good-afternoon."

The lady bowed and the servant conducted the detective to the door.

He leaped into his carriage and drove rapidly away.

After getting well out of sight he called out to the hackman to draw rein.

"My man, did you not make a mistake in the number?"

"Not I, sir."

"You are sure that you took the lady from the steamer to that number?"

"Certain, sir."

"Did you hear her name?"

"No, sir; but I saw it upon one of her trunks."

"Do you recall it?"

"I remember it, sir, though I hain't much of a reader, by its having miss upon both ends."

"How so?"

"It was as follows, sir."

"Miss Fiddle Branch, Miss."

"One was to designate the State from whence she came, and the other was her name, not Fiddle, but Fidele Branch, driver."

"Yes, sir."

"She was an old lady with white hair?"

"No, sir, she was as pretty a young lady as I ever set my two eyes upon."

"I never seen a prettier one in Boston."

"Ah!" said Doom contemplatively.

"She was, sir."

"And did you take her trunks up?"

"Yes, sir."

"To which flat?"

"The top flat, sir, and she gave me a V. for my trouble and driving her."

"Who did you see there?"

"An Irish woman whose eyes watched me the whole time I was in the house."

"No one else?"

"No, sir."

"All right, drop me at the Parker House."

"Yes, sir."

This the driver did and Dick Doom slipped a bill into his hand with the remark:

"There's the match of the V the lady gave you."

"Lordy, but I'm in luck, sir," and then he added:

"It hain't in preachers to be generous, and I'll come and hear you preach some time."

CHAPTER XV.

THE DETECTIVE CALLS AGAIN.

SEVERAL days after the call of Dick Doom upon Miss Branch, in which he had made the mistake he had, the bell of the flat again rung, and this time the same gray-haired lady opened the door, for the servant was out.

The lady was just as neatly dressed as before, wore a lace cap and greeted the caller with a slight look of surprise as she asked:

"Who do you wish to see, sir?"

Miss Branch saw before her a young man, stylishly dressed, with a very handsome face and wearing eye-glasses.

"I wish to see Miss Branch, madam."

"I am Miss Branch."

"May I come in, for I have a message for you?"

"Can you not deliver it here?"

"I prefer to see you in private, madam."

"And I prefer to see you here, sir, so deliver your message, please."

"You are Miss Fidele Branch, are you not?"

"I am Miss Branch, sir."

"Shall I tell you here what I have to tell you of Count Andre Armagnac?"

The lady started, grasped the door with a firmer grip and said, after an instant:

"Walk in, sir."

She led the way to the parlor, and the visitor saw that she was very much moved.

"Be seated, sir, and may I ask your name?" she said, motioning him to a chair.

"My name is Dick Doom, madam."

"And you are acquainted with Count Andre Armagnac, Mr. Doom?"

"No, madam, I never met the gentleman."

"I thought you had a message for me from him, sir, did you not say so?"

"No, madam, I said I had a message for you, and I wished to tell you of Count Armagnac."

"And what of Count Armagnac, sir?"

"You are aware that he was successful in his rescue of Mr. Gibson?"

"Ah! do you know this, sir?"

"Let me tell you what I know, and if I am wrong, correct me, please."

"I am listening, sir."

"You are Miss Fidele Branch, of River Mont Plantation, in Mississippi?"

"Proceed, sir."

"Your brother, Mr. Brandon Branch, is at present in Europe, and taking advantage of his absence you went to New Orleans to aid a man under sentence of death to escape the gallows."

"You suspect this, sir?"

"I know it, madam, as I know that your white hair, glasses and appearance of old age are assumed."

"Sir?"

"Pardon me, but I wish you to hear what I have to say."

"Continue, sir," and Miss Branch was perfectly calm.

"You had a humane motive in wishing to rescue Valentine Gibson from the gallows, for he once saved you from a fearful death upon a burning steamer."

"He was a very handsome man, courtly, had fascinating manners and won hearts as he did money at cards, for his own pleasure only."

"You are speaking, sir, of one who is my friend," was the haughty response.

"I regret it, Miss Branch, in that he was, as a felon, unworthy your friendship."

"He was tried and convicted upon circumstantial evidence, when he is innocent."

"Upon circumstantial evidence?"

"Yes, sir."

"And was innocent?"

"So I believe."

"My dear Miss Branch, let me tell you that he was convicted upon proofs of his guilt in a number of cases, and was guilty on each count."

"He had the fairest of trials, and was sentenced by a judge always known to be merciful."

"He was sentenced to die upon the gallows, and you, as the Vailed Unknown, attended his trial, tried to bribe his jury, and failing, determined upon his rescue."

"You planned well and most cleverly executed."

"You appear to know what I did, sir."

"You do not deny the charge of rescuing Valentine Gibson, Miss Branch?"

"I admit nothing, deny nothing."

"Then see if I am accusing you upon circumstantial evidence."

"Pray continue, sir."

"Your brother had a classmate at Heidelberg Germany, who was a dear friend of his."

"He had had a checkered career, going to Mexico when just in his teens with the ill-fated Maximilian, and afterward going to Heidelberg to receive his education."

"Then he served in the French Army, and won distinction."

"Resigning his commission from the effects of a wound, he traveled about the world."

"Coming to America he visited your home."

"He learned to love you, but was refused, and in vain implored you to accept his heart and hand."

"Your brother wished it so, but you had given your heart to another, and you are not a woman to give your hand where your heart goes not with it."

"You appear to read me well, sir."

"I have done so, and I know that though you loved unworthily you would not wed one man loving another."

"The one you loved got into trouble, and you did all you could to save him from being proven guilty."

"Failing in this you determined to rescue him."

"You suspect this?"

"I know it."

"I know that you sought the aid of one you could trust, one who loved you, and he nobly set to work to serve you and save his rival."

"You plotted, he executed, and he rescued that man Gibson from prison."

"A man who has come to tell you, Miss Branch, certain truths, and to ask you certain questions, which I hope that you will frankly answer."

"What would you know?"

"Do you deny the truth of the story I have told you?"

"I deny nothing."

"May I ask why you came to Boston?"

"That is my own affair, sir."

"Then will you tell me if you know aught of Count Andre Armagnac?"

"Do you, sir?"

"I do."

"Do you know where he is?"

"I do."

"Where?"

"He went into Mexico, did he not?"

"Granted."

"Accompanied by Valentine Gibson, the escaped felon."

"You said as much before."

"The count and his companion—"

"Whom you assert was Mr. Gibson."

"Yes, Miss Branch."

"Well, sir, proceed."

"Went to the rescue of some Americans traveling in Mexico, in their own carriage, and who were attacked by bandits, their coachman shot, and they would have been robbed, perhaps the American gentleman killed, but for the timely coming of the count and his companion, who boldly attacked the robbers against great odds."

"Yes, it was a daring rescue, and not much like the act of a *felon*, think you?"

"Ah, you have heard of the affair, then?" and Dick Doom smiled blandly.

"I did not say so, sir."

"Then you knew that one of the rescuers was killed?"

"Yes, the count."

Dick Doom's face did not change in expression. It was as impassive as though carved of marble.

"No, I thought it was the count's companion who was slain."

"Then upon this point you are not so accurate as in your other statements, sir."

"Perhaps not, Miss Branch; but I supposed it was Mr. Valentine Gibson who was killed in the attack."

"You were not there, sir?"

"I was not."

"You said that you did not know the count?"

"I did not personally know him, Miss Branch."

"Do you know Mr. Valentine Gibson, whom you are pleased to refer to as a *felon*?"

"I did know him well, Miss Branch."

"And you know that one of the two gentlemen who went to the rescue of the American family was killed?"

"I do, for a certainty."

"You say it was the count's companion?"

"Yes, I so believe."

"You are mistaken, sir."

"Ah! then it was the count who was killed, and not Valentine Gibson?"

"What is your interest in knowing, sir?"

"I am a detective," was the calmly uttered reply of Dick Doom and the face of Fidele Branch turned deathly pale.

But, she rallied quickly, and said:

"Well, sir, knowing that Mr. Gibson, the *Felon*, was killed, then you must be aware, and feel bitter disappointment, that he has escaped you by death."

Dick Doom looked the woman straight in the face.

Her eyes met his unflinchingly, for she removed her glasses as though to let him meet her gaze.

"Yes, the gallows has been robbed by his death, in the way it was; but my impression was that you, having heard of the affair, supposed that the count was the one who was killed."

"That was your mistake, sir; but I do know the truth of the affair, and I am happy that you and the gallows were cheated of your prey."

"The duty of a man of my calling, Miss Branch, causes him to do many things that his heart may rebel against."

"A detective with a heart, sir?"

"Oh, yes, I know of such accidents," was the reply.

"I did not believe that possible."

"Perhaps your mentor in such belief was Valentine Gibson."

"I confess the persecution he received had much to do with my idea."

"I am glad to say that you are wrong, Miss Branch, for detectives and police officers are like soldiers, they have tender hearts very often,

and feel for others, though trained against showing any emotion."

"But would you like to hear about the career of Count Armagnac after his rescue of the Americans?"

"I shall be glad to listen to all you have to say, sir."

"He joined the American party and went with them to Vera Cruz, where they became great friends, the count being particularly pleased with Miss Ruby Van Vechten, the daughter of a millionaire of the city, and a young lady of great beauty."

"When the Van Vechtens sailed for home the count remained behind in Vera Cruz."

"Arriving in New York Mrs. Van Vechten discovered that she had been robbed of her own, her daughter's, and a most valuable box of jewels intrusted to her care, and, strange as it may seem, circumstantial evidence pointed to the count."

"Have the jewels been recovered, sir?" quickly asked Miss Branch.

"They have not, and I went to Mexico to see if I could find the thief, but, before my arrival there some time, the count had been killed in a duel with a Mexican—"

"Oh, sir, when was this?" cried Fidele Branch, excitedly.

Dick Doom took out his note-book and gave the exact date.

Miss Branch walked to her desk, glanced at something there, while her face turned very white and her hand trembled.

In an instant her manner changed and she said coolly:

"Pray continue your story, sir."

"The count was killed in a duel, you said?"

"Yes, Miss Branch, by a Mexican, and thus the rescued and rescuer met their fate in Mexico."

"It is very sad, sir; but about those jewels?"

"I could find no trace of them, Miss Branch."

"But I have imposed upon your kindness too long, so will bid you good-afternoon."

The lady bowed without a word, and Dick Doom left her to her own meditations.

CHAPTER XVII. FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

"Who is that man?"

"How did he find me out after all my precautions to cover up my tracks?"

"That is no ordinary man, and yet he seems but a boy in years."

"A detective is he?"

"He is well named, Detective Doom."

"I feel that in what I did I have made myself liable to the law."

"But should I allow him to perish, the man who came to my rescue when all escape was cut off, when I had given up all hope?"

"He came through the flames at the risk of certain death, an appalling one of anguish."

"He said so calmly, so hopefully:

"Do not despair for I will save you."

"There was no doubt in his words, and wrapping me in blankets he rushed through that sea of fire and sprung overboard into the river with me in his arms."

"Then he swam with me to the shore and saved me, all burned and suffering though he was."

"And that is the man my brother Brandon bade me forget."

"That is the man they tell me who is a felon, who is a criminal, a murderer, and who even put his wife to death."

"I cannot believe it of him."

"I will never believe him guilty until he tells me with his own lips that he is guilty."

"I did but my duty in seeking to save him from being found guilty by the jury."

"I failed in that and so I sought to aid him to escape."

"The count proved my noble friend, even though he aided his rival."

"He acted for me, carried out my plan perfectly, and would not allow me to pay any more money than he could help."

"As a reward I pledged to him my word that I would become his wife."

"I had saved Valentine Gibson and so could afford a sacrifice."

"The count is a noble man, a gentleman, and served me for love of me."

"Ah me! if I could have loved him in return."

"But I, Fidele Branch, have but one heart."

"I am properly named, for I am faithful to that one man, Valentine Gibson, who, in all the charges against him, I have not doubted or deserted."

"But this detective, Dick Doom?"

"What an eye he has and how he was reading me."

"He tripped me once in regard to which was the one killed in going to the rescue of the American family."

"Until I looked at my letter and saw the date again, I almost dreaded the result to have been different from what I had believed."

"He, Detective Doom, said that the count's companion, Valentine Gibson, had been killed in the attack."

"My letter states that it was the count who was killed."

"My letter tells the truth."

"And how noble of the count to write me as he did, releasing me of my pledge to become his wife, once Valentine Gibson was safe."

"He told me that he had held me to my pledge to try the test of my love."

"Finding that I would accept the sacrifice he released me."

"Count Andre Armagnac was a noble man, and he went to his death in serving me, for except to get Valentine Gibson beyond pursuit he would not have gone to Mexico."

"Poor fellow."

"Peace to his ashes forever."

She paused in her long soliloquy and tapped the floor with the toe of her tiny slipper.

Then she resumed her musings again:

"What strange story is this which Detective Doom told me about that American family losing their jewels, and the count being suspected as the thief."

"The count is dead, so could not be suspected."

"And the family are from Boston, and the young lady was beautiful and an heiress."

"I must see her, I must tell them that I knew Count Andre Armagnac and wish to learn the particulars of his death."

"I hope my brother will remain abroad, for he would interfere with my being here in Boston."

"But as long as I address my letters to him from the plantation and send them to old Mammy Chloe to mail, he will not believe that I am away."

"I must remain here, for his letter bade me come here, and here he would join me."

"I shall obey him as I do the law, ay, better."

"But this detective has given me food for thought."

"I cannot understand how he thinks it was Valentine Gibson who was killed in the attack on the bandits in Mexico, and that the count joined the American party and went with them to Vera Cruz."

"There he lost his life, killed in a duel with a young Mexican."

"I wish I could solve this mystery, I wish that I could understand it all."

"But I can only wait."

"Yet I will go and see this beautiful Miss Van Vechten, the heiress, and know just what happened at that rescue."

"I cannot abide this suspense, so I will go at once."

"There is no need of my wearing this gray hair, which I donned for propriety's sake, living alone here in Boston with my servant girl."

"No, I will go as I am in *propria persona*, for men, yes, and women too have said that I was also beautiful in face and form."

"No, I am nervous to-day, I will wait and go to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVIII.

DICK DOOM AT HOME.

The detective went from the home of Miss Branch to his own quarters.

He too had evidently received food for thought.

He settled himself in dressing-gown and slippers, as though to take his comfort and not go out any more on that day.

About him were the utensils of an engraver, and some specimens of work on steel and wood, not yet complete.

They were bought for effect, for Dick Doom was no engraver.

There was a piano in his room, a guitar and a cornet.

He seemed restless, for he sat down and ran his hands over the keys of the piano.

He playad with an exquisite touch, full of sympathy.

But tiring of the piano he started to take up the cornet.

"From mercy for my neighbors I resist temptation," he muttered, and the cornet was laid aside.

Then he took up his guitar, played the Spanish Fandango, next sung a Mexican ballad in a voice that was a deep, rich contralto.

But music soon bored him and he began to read a novel.

The author soon tired him and the book was cast aside.

Next he took a photograph from an album and gazed at it earnestly.

"Beautiful indeed she is, and her face reveals great pluck, indomitable will and conscious power."

"She is a woman to do and dare anything for the man she loves, but beware if he wins her hatred, for then she is one to dread."

"I like her face, yes, admire it immensely."

"It is the same face I saw to-day, as it will be when age has mellowed it and the hair is whitened."

The photograph which he was gazing upon was that of Fidele Branch, the one which the New Orleans chief had purloined and sent to him.

With the recollection of the chief recalled by the photograph, he sat down and wrote him.

The letter was in part as follows:

"I have found the Vailed Lady of the court.

"I track'd her to her quarters.

"She has secured a pleasant flat on the top floor of a fashionable flat hotel.

"Her home is furnished charmingly and she has an Irish girl to look after her comfort.

"Miss Branch is here as a lady of forty-five, a spinster, with white hair, glasses and caps.

"She is a most attractive old lady, but I penetrated her disguise.

"I told her my story just as I had planned it out, of how she had plotted the rescue and been aided by the count.

"I hit the dead center of the target.

"But I am at sea again.

"I'll tell you why.

"After going to Mexico, after discovering that Valentine Gibson was killed, in the attack upon the bandits, she, having also had some information from the scene, coolly informs me that it was the count who was killed.

"I saw that she felt she was trapped, and she hedged beautifully, calmly admitting that it was not the count who was killed by the bandits.

"I told her of the count's joining the Van Vechtens, the beauty and riches of Miss Van Vechten, the loss of the jewels, and at last of the death of the nobleman, slain in a duel.

"I could have read a marble face easier than hers, for she took it all in, and was noncommittal and undemonstrative.

"She is a Sphinx at will, a wonder at all times, and would make a record as a lady detective.

"My deductions are that she knows just which man was killed by the bandits, and is in Boston for a purpose, so you see I was right to run down the Vailed Unknown.

"I shall watch her, for she is the pivot upon which the solution of this mysterious tragedy turns.

"But the question arises in my mind:

"Is Valentine Gibson dead?

"Another question is:

"Is the count dead?

"Was it Gibson who was killed by the bandits, or the count?

"Or, again:

"Was Gibson the man with the count?

"Then comes the other question:

"Where are those jewels?

"Who got those jewels?

"In my mind the fair Sphinx is the one who will yet be made to answer all these questions, either directly or indirectly.

"I am here to stay until I solve the mystery, and I have a clew regarding the jewels which I cannot yet make known to you.

"It is a most difficult case to handle, as it is on a track where I have no right to go; but I will work it for all it is worth.

"I am delightfully located here, so address me as George Avery, Engraver, to street and number as written above.

"The field of operations is entirely removed from New Orleans, also from New York, and Boston is indeed the hub around which the interest centers, so I am in the right place.

"Must write a line also to the New York chief.

"My kind remembrances to your good wife, whose kindness to me I can never forget.

"Will keep you informed.

"Yours to command,

"DICK DOOM."

The letter to the New York chief was also written and then Dick Doom seemed to feel that he could give himself an outing at the theater, and did so, but in disguise.

In one of the boxes he saw the Van Vechtens.

In the opposite box was Miss Branch and her servant.

"It is a coincidence," he muttered.

CHAPTER XIX.

MISS BRANCH MAKES A VISIT.

"MISS FIDELE BRANCH—

"Where have I heard the name, mamma?" and Ruby Van Vechten handed over a card to her mother bearing on it the name above mentioned.

"It is familiar to me too—ah! was it not the

poor count whom we heard speak of a Miss Fidele Branch, a Southern girl?"

"Yes, I recall her now.

"He had met her brother at the University of Heidelberg and when he came to this country visited at their plantation, somewhere on the Mississippi.

"Why has she called upon me, I wonder?"

"You must see her, Ruby."

"Oh yes, mother," and Ruby Van Vechten went down to the parlor.

Never in her life had she looked more beautiful, for she was dressed most becomingly, had returned from a drive which gave color to her cheeks, and certainly was one to command the admiration of any one.

She swept into the parlor with her quick, graceful step and saw a lady standing by the window.

It was a form of regal beauty, a well-poised head, red bronze hair, and a costume that was simply perfect.

At the sound of her step her visitor turned and Ruby Van Vechten saw the face of her visitor.

It was a face to see and never forget, one to win a man and command a woman's admiration.

The large, dreamy eyes of the darkest blue, the refined, perfect mouth, with red lips and teeth even and white as snow, the straight nose, stamped with character, all made up a face that was a study for an artist.

Ruby Van Vechten was won by her at once, and as she advanced offered her hand in the frank, natural way she had of greeting any one she cared for.

"Miss Branch, I am glad to meet you, for you are not unknown to me, as I have heard Count Armagnac speak of you."

Whatever the motive of Fidele Branch in calling upon Ruby Van Vechten, this cordial welcome at once put her upon her guard.

Still she was not cold in her manner, as she took the offered hand and replied in just such a voice as Ruby had thought just such a woman should possess:

"Miss Van Vechten, I owe you an apology for calling upon you, a stranger to me, but I have come to know from you the truth regarding an occurrence which happened in Mexico, as you were, I believe, present."

"No apology is needed, Miss Branch, and I am really glad to meet you, while I will give you any information which lies in my power."

"You are very kind."

"Not at all; but be seated, please."

"You are from the South, I believe?"

"Yes, I am a Mississippi country girl," was the answer with a smile.

"Indeed, I should not have suspected it," was the flattering response.

"Yes, I was born and reared upon a plantation; but you know our country home life in the South is somewhat different from what it is in the North, for we Southerners prefer the country to the city."

"Yes, and we of the North are beginning to be educated up to the same feeling, for now our homes away from the city are far different from what they once were."

"That is as it should be."

"Now we gather around us large libraries, works of art, souvenirs of travel, have music and all to make indoor life enjoyable, while we have our carriages, horses, boats, and games for outdoor exercise, with visits from those we care for, and visiting when we temporarily tire of home."

"But see, I am wandering far from my subject, for I came to speak to you of your late visit to Mexico?"

"What can I tell you of it?"

"I believe you were attacked, while traveling, by Mexican robbers."

"Yes, our driver was killed, my father shot one of the robbers, but was overpowered, and I believe he would have been slain and mamma and myself held for ransom, but for a gallant rescue by Count Andre Armagnac and a friend of his."

"It is of this rescue, which I congratulate you upon, which I wish to speak to you about."

"Yes, Miss Branch."

"One of the rescuers was killed?"

"Yes."

"Was it the count?"

"Oh, no, it was the count's friend."

The lips of Miss Branch closed tightly for an instant, but she said after a slight pause:

"You are sure of this?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly sure, Miss Branch."

"Did you know the count prior to his rescue of you?"

"No, we had not that pleasure."

"Pardon me for being so inquisitive, but you are sure one of the two was killed?"

"Perfectly."

"Were they alone?"

"Yes, they were traveling alone."

"And the robbers fired upon them as they advanced?"

"Yes, killing the friend of the count, while the latter, undaunted, shot two of the men and wounded several others, putting them to flight by his determined courage."

"It was a very brave act, Miss Branch."

"It certainly was, and the count went on with you to Vera Cruz?"

"Yes, he joined our party, after burying his friend and the other dead."

"Both the count and his friend I knew well, Miss Van Vechten, hence my anxiety to know the exact truth."

"The count left you in Vera Cruz?"

"Yes, where he was afterward killed in a duel with a Mexican, a sad ending of a brilliant career."

"Yes, very sad."

"But I thank you, Miss Van Vechten."

"Will you not allow me to call upon you, Miss Branch, while in the city?"

"Thank you, but my stay is so limited here; but I recall now having seen you at the theater last night."

"Yes, as I did you in the opposite box."

Thus these two parted, and a certain uneasy feeling remained in the heart of each, which neither could account for.

CHAPTER XX.

RUBY VAN VECHTEN'S REASONING.

MISS VAN VECHTEN returned to her mother's room, after the visit of Miss Branch, with a strange expression upon her face.

"Well, Ruby, who was your visitor?"

"One of the most beautiful women I ever saw."

"That is saying a great deal, my child."

"It is not a whit too much to say of Miss Fidele Branch."

"I never saw a more beautiful girl, in face or in form."

"But you have seen her."

"I?"

"Yes, and you made the same criticism regarding her, mamma."

"When was that, Ruby?"

"Do you remember the lady who sat in the box opposite to us last night?"

"Yes, she was indeed beautiful, and your beaux fairly raved about her, though no one knew her."

"She had as an escort a servant girl, I think it was."

"That was Miss Branch, mamma."

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"Then she is indeed very beautiful."

"But does she wear?"

"If you mean by that is she made up, I can only say that I do not believe she uses even powder."

"She does not have to."

"And her manners?"

"Are simply fascinating."

"Who is she?"

"A Southern girl, reared on a plantation, and one to admire, yes, and love."

"Why did she call on you?"

"To know the truth of that robber attack in Mexico, for both the count and his companion were known to her."

"I remember the count speaking of her."

"Oh, yes, mamma; but deep a reader of human nature as I flatter myself I am, I could not for the life of me tell which man she was in love with, the count or his friend."

"Was it with either?"

"Yes, mother, else why did she come?"

"To ask about them as friends?"

"No, she wished to know the truth as to which was killed."

"She appeared a little surprised at hearing it was the count's friend."

"Then she asked me about the count and I told her of his death."

"What did she say about that?"

"She appeared perfectly unmoved, though I felt certain that she was deeply stirred about it, or about the death of both of them."

"Yes, once I heard him speak of him as Valentine."

"Now, Ruby, how did Miss Branch know about this affair?"

"There! I certainly forgot to ask her."

"She showed no greater feeling when you spoke of the death of the one than the other?"

"Not the slightest, mamma."

"Do you recall what our friend, Detective Doom, had to say about the count's friend?"

"Yes, that he was an escaped prisoner, or felon, a murderer."

"True, and it may be that the man was her brother."

"It may be so, mother, yet I would hardly think a man with such a sister could be so vile a wretch as Detective Doom painted him."

"Ruby!" sharply said Mrs. Van Vechten.

"Yes, mother?"

"Have you forgotten one who had such a sister, a noble father and a devoted mother?"

"Have you forgotten how your father went to—"

"No! no! no! mother, do not speak to me of poor Vivian, for never will I believe that he was guilty of crime, no, never! never! never!" and the eyes of Ruby Van Vechten flashed fire.

"We will not discuss the matter, my child," said Mrs. Van Vechten.

"Let us return to Miss Branch, mother."

"Is there more to tell of her?"

"There must be, for she is not from Boston, her stay here is limited she told me, for I expressed a wish to call upon her, and I almost believe that she came here from the South to know the truth about the one who was killed in coming to our rescue."

"It may be."

"You remember that she was alone at the theater, that is, she had a servant as an escort."

"Very true."

"No one knew her, of our set, and she certainly is an aristocratic person, and the equal of any one I know."

"She came here for a purpose, and when I see Mr. Dick Doom, as that mysterious detective calls himself, I shall tell him of her."

"It may cause her trouble, and you would not wish that certainly."

"By no means, but there is nothing wrong in that young girl, I will stake my own honor on it."

"She has her troubles, and is trying to get at the bottom of some mystery."

"What the count or his friend may be to her she was too deep to reveal, but there is something back of her interest in knowing of their death."

"It may be love, and it may not, but when a woman interests herself very deeply in a man I believe that either love or hate is the corner stone."

"Why, Ruby, you talk like an old woman."

"I talk from the standpoint of a young girl who knows the world, is acquainted with herself, hence knows her sex, and reasons straight from the shoulder, mamma."

"But here comes papa, and he is home early."

CHAPTER XXI.

A LETTER FROM MEXICO.

MR. VAN VECHTEN'S early return home was, in Ruby's mind, a proof that he had some news, as neither she or her mother had an engagement with him on that afternoon.

Although retired from business, Mr. Van Vechten had considerable to do in looking after his millions, so had an office in one of his buildings down town.

Then, too, he was connected with several fashionable clubs, and there were constant calls upon his time which kept him busy 'most all the forenoon.

He managed, however, to find leisure for a ride, drive or short yachting cruise, or a run to the mountains, a hunt or fish, and thus tempered business cares with pleasure.

Mr. Van Vechten went at once up to his wife's sitting-room.

"Well, papa, you have some news, and like a woman you cannot keep it," said Ruby.

"I have news, that's true."

"But how did you know it, Ruby?"

"You came home earlier than usual, and your step and look were a sure indication, papa."

"I believe you are a mind reader."

"I only wish I was, sir."

"Is it about the jewels, Robin?"

Mrs. Van Vechten asked the question anxiously.

"No, it is a letter which I just received."

"From whom?"

"Mexico."

"About the jewels?"

"Well, not exactly, and yet it refers to them."

"Please do not keep mamma in suspense, papa."

"And how about you Ruby?"

"Oh, I am young yet, so have time to wait, was the quick response of Ruby."

"Here is the letter and I will read it to you."

Mr. Van Vechten opened a letter bearing the Mexican post-mark.

It was addressed and written in a running back-hand that was very legible.

The letter was dated at the hotel in Vera Cruz where the Van Vechtens had stopped when there, and was as follows:

"MR. ROBIN VAN VECHTEN:—

"MY DEAR SIR:—I shall present myself to your acquaintance by saying that I am the younger brother of the late Count Andre Armagnac."

"I was called here by the sad news of my brother's death, as I am the heir to his title and estates, through the kindness of the landlord of the hotel where I am staying and who wrote me of the unfortunate and untimely end of Count Andre."

"As soon as I could do so, I came here, and the landlord has turned over to me the effects of my brother, whose remains I shall send to France for burial."

"The landlord has also told me much of yourself and family, and of the affair that led to the count's meeting with you, and his devotion to you all."

"Of his friend, killed in the attack on the bandits, I know nothing, he being an American friend of the count, and unknown to me even by name."

"It is a sad task for me to come here and find only my dead brother, for we were devoted to each other, though much separated in life."

"I am therefore most anxious to meet you, his American friend, and talk with you of him, so shall make it my pleasure and duty to visit your city that I may meet you, as I shall be detained in the United States looking to financial interests of the count here, for perhaps many months, while in truth I love your America so much, having often been there before, that I may make it my home one of these days."

"But my only excuse for inflicting myself upon you is not wholly to talk with you of my brother, but perhaps to render you a slight service."

"In coming to Vera Cruz I came via Havana, and upon the steamer met a traveling tradesman who insisted upon showing me some handsome jewels he had purchased."

"They were so rare that I bought them of him, and upon examining them in Vera Cruz discovered the name of your wife and daughter upon a necklace, bracelets and locket."

"I also observed the initials V. V. in small letters upon a gold pin, rings and earrings, and this convinced me that the jewelry had been stolen, and a talk with the landlord gave me to understand that you had sent a detective to Vera Cruz to try and discover these very jewels and the thief."

"I at once set out in search of the man of whom I purchased them and found him without trouble."

"He told me that he had bought them of a trader in Havana, at a price a little above what I had paid him for them, and as of course with papers to show that he had been swindled by purchasing stolen jewels, he could get his money returned to him, he gave me back the amount he had received from me."

"I will then be enabled to return the lost jewelry to you, though of course do not know whether it is all intact or not."

"I shall keep the name and address of the man I purchased them of, for your future use, if needed, but I believe he is wholly innocent in the matter."

"For some little time I shall be detained here yet, but then shall take the steamer for New York, and thence to your city, no ifying you upon my arrival."

"Thanking you and your family for your generous courtesy to my brother, I am

"With distinguished consideration,

"COUNT ADAIR ARMAGNAC."

"Now, wife, what do you and Ruby think of that?"

"It is a most remarkable affair, and we will be delighted to meet Count Andre's brother," said Mrs. Van Vechten.

"And to get track of those jewels," was Ruby's response.

CHAPTER XXII.

DICK DOOM LOSES A CLEW.

DICK DOOM had considered it a coincidence when he saw the Van Vechtens in one box of the theater, and Miss Branch in another just *vis à-vis*, while he was in the orchestra seat between, though not recognized by either in his disguise of an old man.

He had recognized Miss Branch by the photograph he had of her, and yet had he been in any doubt, the face of the servant in the rear of the box would have convinced him.

He had to admit that she was certainly a very beautiful young lady, as he gazed upon her face, all unconscious seemingly, of the unbounded admiration she commanded.

He heard upon all sides of him questions as to who she was, and saw that no one knew her, for not a soul visited her box during the evening.

She enjoyed the play, applauded the good

points, laughed when there was anything to amuse, and her face saddened with any pathos she witnessed.

There was one thing that troubled Dick Doom.

He could not make out just why Fidele Branch had come to Boston.

Again he could not understand why she lived in disguise at the flat.

Why she had sought to hide herself, had taken pains to cover up her retreat from the hotel, was another source of wonder to him.

After the theater he saw her take a carriage with her servant and order him to return:

"Home."

A number were disappointed, for they had expected to hear her give her address.

But the coachman evidently knew where "Home" was.

Another circumstance Mr. Dick Doom noticed after a few days.

He was fond of riding and driving, and often went for a spin or a gallop.

On one occasion he met "Miss Branch, Senior," as he called the maiden in disguise.

Again he met her and she was in the same landau, had the same coachman.

It was very evident that Miss Branch was indulging herself in a horse and landau for a drive at will.

Again he met the same vehicle and driver, but this time "Miss Branch, Junior" was the occupant.

There she reclined most gracefully, the cynosure of all eyes, and apparently unconscious of everything save the pleasure she experienced in the drive.

Again he met "Miss Branch, Jr., and this time she was mounted upon what his critical eye told him was a Kentucky thoroughbred saddle-horse.

The animal had a swift single-foot rack which was perfect, and, at the will of his rider broke into a graceful canter.

Miss Branch, Jr., was dressed in a dark-blue riding-habit trimmed with silver cord and buttons.

She wore not the stiff hats that lady riders affect and look so horrid in, but a soft black slouch, pinned up upon one side with a gold star, and having a sable plume falling upon her shoulder.

Her seat in the saddle a Mexican could have found no fault with, and she managed her high-spirited horse with ease and confidence.

Behind her, at the "regulation distance," rode the coachman who always drove Miss Branch, Sr., and Miss Branch, Jr.

"I never saw a more beautiful woman, or a more perfect rider," mused Dick Doom, who was out as a jockey, airing his master's horses.

Another time Dick Doom appeared as an elderly gentleman, in neat-fitting riding suit, top-boots and high hat.

A third time he was a mounted policeman, wearing no other disguise.

To his great amazement one afternoon Miss Branch suddenly wheeled alongside of his horse.

"May I ask, sir, if you are watching me?"

Dick Doom was startled. He saw that she had recognized him! He gave her credit for being most clever.

But he was evasive. His answer was:

"I beg pardon, miss."

"I have seen you as an old man, as a jockey, as a bowling swell on horseback, and now as a mounted policeman, so I would ask if you are watching me, Detective Doom?"

"I see that you do know me," the disguised detective had to admit.

"Oh, yes, as a man of many masks, I know you, Mr. Doom."

"You are very clever, indeed, to penetrate my disguises."

"Not in the least, for you go on a contrary rule from the bird which sticks his head in the sand and believes he is hidden; you disguise your body, and not your face."

"I believe you are right, Miss Branch; I must be more careful."

"If you are watching me, yes; but if you are trying to hide yourself from some officer of the law, no, for they are often obtuse, never so clever as you are."

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Doom; but, by the way, is there anything good at the theaters this week, for I notice that you attend?"

"Yes, 'Led Astray' is being played at the Boston, this week."

"Thanks, I will attend, if only to see a frightful example of what it is to be led astray. You go, also, and see if you can discover the moral, Mr. Doom," and she rode on.

"Cool that; and clever, very! I must con-

tinue to keep an eye on her, for there is mischief in her if she is so inclined—much mischief."

And the next day when Dick Doom called at the Branch flat, he discovered the moral of the play—he had been led astray, he had lost his clew of the Vaile Unknown!

CHAPTER XXIII.

TRACKING A WOMAN.

DICK DOOM smiled when he discovered that Miss Branch had moved from her flat.

True, it had been furnished, so she only had her trunks to move.

But where had she gone was the question?

Dick Doom sought the janitor.

The lady had paid a month in advance, he said, had simply given notice of her departure for the South, and had ordered her own carriage to take herself and servant away, while a wagon had called for her trunks.

Did he know the carriage or the wagon's driver?

He did not!

Was it a livery stable carriage, or a hack?

He saw no number on the lamps, so supposed it was from a stable.

"What stables are in this neighborhood?"

The man named several.

Dick Doom went to no less than twenty.

At not one had a carriage been sent to the number of the flat.

He went to the Wagon Express offices.

Not one had taken the trunks from the number named.

Dick Doom then returned to the janitor.

He knew nothing more.

Perhaps his wife did.

She did not, he was sure.

"Go and see if I cannot have a talk with her," and a five-dollar bill slipped into the hand of the janitor brought the response:

"Perhaps the old lady does know something."

But the "old lady" did not.

Her memory was refreshed by a bill such as her husband had received, but it did no good.

At last a thought flashed upon the detective.

"Do you know the woman servant who was with Miss Branch?"

The janitress did not.

"Did you have no talk with her?"

The woman was not one to talk.

"Where did Miss Branch get her?"

Then the janitress remembered that Miss Branch, Sr., had come and engaged the flat.

She had said she was going out to find a servant.

Within an hour a servant had come, the woman whom Dick Doom had seen, and took charge of the flat.

"The lady could not have gone very far in that time."

"Is there an intelligence office near here?"

"Yes, one over on the avenue."

The detective at once went in search of the office.

He found several, and the last one he hit upon by accident.

It had a sign which read:

"Honest Women's Home. Faithful Servants furnished."

Dick Doom found a lady at the desk within.

His story was a plausible one: a lady whom he was most anxious to find had moved the day before, and left no address.

She had procured a servant at that place, and so he had come hoping thus to find her.

The lady looked over her books.

"What name?"

"Miss Branch?"

"What address?"

It was given.

"What date?"

That was given also.

"Yes, I have the name of the servant and her address."

"She lives in Blank street, Number —.

"A dollar, please."

"Take two for the good of the Honest Women's Home," was the reply, and the lady clerk smiled, changed the two-dollar bill, put one dollar into her pocket, the other into the cash drawer.

"It is a case of profit and loss," muttered Dick Doom who watched her in a mirror, as he wrote the servant's name and address in his note-book.

He went out and made his way to the address, taking a horse-car.

It was an humble home in the outskirts of the town, and a woman who resembled the one he was in search of opened the door at his knock.

"Could she tell him where he could secure a good servant?"

She was sorry she could not, but her sister,

a splendid servant, had gotten a place some weeks before.

"Perhaps she is not satisfied, and if I went to see her she might be willing to—"

"Indade and she wouldn't thet same, for me sister is more than satisfied, being with a lady who pays her big wages and mighty little to do, for the washing was done at the laundry and only the cooking done."

"Well, give me the address of your sister, for I will write her in case she ever gives up her place."

"Her address is here, right at this house, sur."

"But she does not live here?"

"No, and I don't know where she does live, for she was niver afther telling me thet same."

Dick Doom felt that he was foiled.

But he was not one to give up.

He put his mind to find a way out of his difficulty, and muttered as he went along:

"Ah, yes, I fully discover the moral of 'Led Astray.'

"I admire that woman for her wit and pluck—ah! I have it."

A bright idea had suddenly flashed upon him, for his mind was busy with plotting,

"The servant's sister said that the washing was done out."

"This is Thursday, and Miss Branch left last night."

"Now the washing would not be ready so soon, and I'll just find the laundry and discover where it was to be sent."

"I believe I am on the right track after all, but it is harder to track a woman any time than a man."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THWARTED.

DICK DOOM made his way home.

When he left there an hour after he was dressed as a woman, and any one would have taken him for a good-looking lady's maid.

"If I am going to ask about a lady's wash, it is well to go in petticoats," he mused.

He went to the laundries in the neighborhood of the flat where Miss Branch had lived. There were several and at each he asked the question:

"Did Miss Branch leave her address, when she moved, where you should send her laundry clothes, for she has forgotten?"

At two places they had no such customer.

At the third place the man looked over the books and said:

"Yes."

"She sent the other girl and was afraid she had not given it correctly, for she is so stupid."

The man read the address and asked:

"Is that right?"

"Yes, sir, thank you," and Dick Doom left the place with a complacent smile upon his face.

He was out for an airing, so concluded to look up the place to which Miss Branch had moved.

It was a drug-store with flats above.

Of course Miss Branch had one of those flats, and thus satisfied, Dick Doom returned home.

The next day he said as he sat at breakfast:

"I'll do it!"

He started for his rooms and mused:

"Yes, I'll show her that she can not recognize me, and that she has not led me astray, that I have tracked her."

"If she moves again, all right; I'll have the pleasure of another hunt for her and I rather like the work."

A short while after a lady in deep mourning left the rooms of George Avery, engraver, called a carriage and was driven to the flats which Dick Doom had seen the day before.

There were three flats, the janitor said, one occupied by the druggist, another by a doctor, the third vacant.

"But some laundry clothes were sent to this address?"

"Oh, yes, to the drug store, so ask there, madam."

The question was asked in the drug store for the laundry clothes of Miss Branch, sent from the Gilt Edge Laundry.

"Ah, yes, madam, but Miss Branch called herself in a carriage this morning and got them."

"Do you know her address, sir?"

"I do not."

"Do you ever see her?"

"Never saw her before this morning, ma'am."

"Well, I am not so smart as I thought I was."

"Now what is to be done?"

"Ah! I forget, the post-office."

But Dick Doom decided it would not be well

for him to call upon the postmaster as a lady, so he sought the chief of police.

He was received somewhat testily, for the chief was busy.

"I see that I'll have to show you your own badge, chief, to gain your good services to-day," said the detective.

"Dick Doom, you have done me again."

"Well, you make a very handsome woman with your widow's frills in that natty little bonnet."

"Who is your dressmaker, for my wife is certainly kicking at hers, and yours knows how to make a man into a perfect feminine form divine," and the chief laughed.

"I have come for your help, sir, now; but will tell you that I have the best man dressmaker in New York, for my success in disguises depends upon their perfection."

"You are right, sir, and you have reduced this detective business down to a science."

"Now what can I do for you?"

"I wish to know from the postmaster just where letters to Miss Fidele Branch are delivered, please."

The chief wrote a few lines and dispatched a messenger with the note to the postoffice.

He returned in a short while and gave the chief a slip of paper upon which was written:

"All letters arriving for Miss Fidele Branch have been delivered to Tremont Hotel. Yours,

"P. M."

Straight to the Tremont went Dick Doom.

He asked to see the clerk in the parlor, and wished to know if there were any letters for Miss Branch, and if she called for them.

"A friend of Miss Branch, who she said would call for her letters, was here not half an hour ago and got a letter for her."

"Pardon me, but may I ask if you noticed the postmark?"

"Yes, it was from Vera Cruz, Mexico."

"Thank you."

"Now let me ask you how often Miss Branch calls for her mail?"

"Her friend calls every day."

"Permit me to take you into my confidence."

"I am a detective, as you will see," and Dick Doom opened his stylish crepe-trimmed jacket and revealed a number of very elegant badges, all of solid gold and some sparkling with diamonds and other gems.

The hotel clerk was impressed, a very remarkable thing, I admit, for a hotel clerk, yet in this case, never theless, true.

"I wish to say to you, sir—"

"Yes, madam."

"That the one I am on the track of can only be found by getting the address of Miss Branch."

"She is living somewhere in the city, but where I do not know, and I wish to find her, and through her, others."

"I shall therefore ask you to take two bell-boys into your employ who are in my pay."

"One is to be constantly on duty, and when next the friend of Miss Branch calls, point her out to my boy."

"Do you understand me?"

"Fully, madam, and you may rely upon me," was the answer.

CHAPTER XXV.

UNMASKED.

DICK DOOM went from the hotel back to the chief of police.

"Have you a young detective who can play the part of a boy, chief?"

"Yes, I have the very man to suit you."

"Is he here?"

"Yes."

"Please send for him."

The chief did so.

A boyish-looking man, below the medium height, and of slender form entered.

"Matt, I wish you to do some work for this lady."

"Certainly, sir."

"You are to go to the Tremont, report to the clerk as a bell-boy,

with the address and go off duty, and your pay and liberal pay, will await you."

"Thank you, madam," and that evening the detective, as Matt the bell-boy, went on duty at the hotel.

The next morning Dick Doom arose at his usual hour, went out and got his breakfast, put his rooms in order, and then began to make his toilet.

His costume was a new purchase, a uniform jacket and pants, with a cap.

It was the uniform of a bell-boy in fact.

He donned it and looked to be just what he intended.

He went to the hotel and reported to the clerk just at ten o'clock.

Matt, the bell-boy, was just going off duty and he recognized him, though the Boston detective little thought that he saw in the new boy the Lady in Black.

And the clerk never had such a thought either.

That day Dick Doom watched in vain.

The friend of Miss Branch did not call for her letters.

But the next day, just as he came on duty the clerk called him.

"Here, boy, take these letters up to a lady who has called for them.

"She will ask for the mail for Miss Branch."

Dick Doom did as he was told.

There was a nice old lady in the waiting-room, and one who had the look of being from the country, for her bonnet and shawl were of ancient date.

"The clerk sent this up, ma'am, if you wants the letter for Miss Branch," said the detective.

The old lady grasped at the one letter held out to her, and replied:

"Yes, yes, thankee leetle boy, and here's a quarter for you."

She fumbled in a long black bag, found her purse, an old-fashioned one, and handed the quarter to Dick Doom, who thanked her profusely, cut a few steps of the "Mobile Buck," but when the old lady left the hotel followed her.

He saw her take a carriage, and he called a coupe.

"Keep that carriage with the red wheels in sight, but do not appear to do so."

The cabman followed, the doors closed, the curtains pulled down, and drove by a number some minute or two after the carriage rolled away.

It was a pleasant cottage in the outskirts of the city, and as he went by Dick Doom called to the cabman to stop.

Springing out he ran up to the door and rung the bell.

There was no mistake this time, for the servant of the flat opened the door.

"The clerk at the hotel sent me after the lady with another letter."

"I had an awful time catching up with her," he said.

"Give it to me."

"No, I'll only give it to the lady herself."

"Yez is afther yez fee, me boy, yis and ye'll git it."

"Oh! but yez hotel brats is afther being smart, ye are," and the woman went off to inform her mistress of the supposed bell-boy's presence.

As she went by the hat-rack she viciously snatched a wrap off it, with a backward look as though she wished to remove temptation to break the Eighth Commandment beyond his reach.

The woman now returned and said the lady was in the rear parlor and would see him.

He walked into the rear parlor, and there sat the old lady whom he had seen at the hotel.

She had not removed her bonnet or shawl, dropping down into an easy-chair, as though tired, and had begun to read her letter.

"You say that you have another letter for me, that the clerk sent you to overtake me?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You must be a good runner, and possess great endurance, for I drove rapidly home."

"I hadn't forgot that you gave me a quarter, ma'am, and so I took a carriage."

"Ah! then I will pay your fare, and give you a liberal fee besides."

"Thank you, ma'am; but I wish to return the quarter you gave me, so here it is, and here is the letter I brought you; and, as it is from Mexico, I thought I might get you to tell me about your friends there?"

The woman sprung to her feet and cried, indignantly:

"I know you now!"

"You are—"

"Dick Doom, the detective, Miss Branch," was the cool reply.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PLEDGE OF DICK DOOM.

It took a bold man to meet those flashing eyes, that quivering look turned upon the detective by Miss Branch.

But Dick Doom was that man.

He never flinched.

He met the gaze unmoved, and the movement of Miss Branch toward a desk in the room did not cause him to appear at all disconcerted.

From the desk she took something, then came toward the detective.

Quick as a flash she covered him with a revolver, and said in a voice full of suppressed anger:

"Your life is at my mercy."

"Granted, if you were a different woman."

"What do you mean?"

"It is not in you to commit murder, though you would kill, risk any peril, do any deed of daring if you acted from a sense of duty."

"A sense of duty, of self-defense, impels me to kill you."

"Your sense of honor impels you more strongly not to do so."

"I am not so sure of that."

"Miss Branch, sit down and let me talk with you, for candidly I do not fear your pistol."

"I am in the discharge of my duty, and if I die I will be the one to suffer the least regret, for this has not been a happy world to me."

"Sit there and hear what I have to say."

There was that in the man's words and manner that influenced the woman to obey.

There he stood before her, looking like a handsome boy of sixteen, not an atom of fear in his look or voice.

She returned to the desk, replaced the pistol and sat down.

"Sit there, sir," and she pointed to a seat opposite to her.

"Now, sir, what have you to say?"

"I am in the discharge of my duty, Miss Branch, and so have tracked you."

"I have taken no advantage, though I have the power—see!" and he opened his jacket and revealed the official badges.

"I have the power to have your letters read, to arrest you, to take you to prison; but, I would do neither."

"I know that you love Valentine Gibson."

"Did you believe him to be what I know him to be, then Miss Branch would hate and detest where she has loved."

"It has been a match game between us, and knowing your nature I feel that you would enjoy hearing how I found you."

"But I will not detain you now."

"I know that you have received a letter from Mexico, from Vera Cruz, and here is another one—this is in fact the third."

"Take it, for its contents are sacred to you."

"The letter you are reading is from the old negress at your plantation."

"I saw that much before I handed it to you."

"Now you have been told by me, that both Count Andre Armagnac and Valentine Gibson are dead."

"I so believed when I told you so."

"You do not now?"

"I do not."

"What has changed your opinion?"

"First, I saw that you were distressed at my telling you Gibson was dead the other day, until you consulted a date."

"That was a letter."

"Well?"

"I saw that you were distressed at the count being also dead."

"If both were dead, you would never have received that letter."

"The one addressed to you there in your hand is from one of those men."

"Which one?"

"I'll show you—see here."

He took from an inner pocket some papers out of a leather case.

"This is the writing of one of those men."

"Compare it with the address upon your letter."

"Well, they are doubtless the same handwriting."

"They are."

"Who wrote it?"

"Valentine Gibson."

"You need not be so sure."

"But I am."

"Why not the writing of Count Andre Armagnac?"

"It cannot be, for I know Gibson's writing too well."

"Do you know the count's?"

"I do not, I confess."

"Here is a letter from him."

"Compare the writing."

She went to her desk and took out a note.

It was written on paper bearing the count's coat of arms, and was signed by that nobleman.

"The writing is a fac-simile I admit," said Dick Doom, puzzled.

"Yes, and which one addressed this letter from Mexico?"

"I confess that I do not know."

"Yet you would find out?"

"And will?"

"The writer, be he Valentine Gibson or Count Armagnac, is playing a sharp game, for both men are considered to be dead."

"This you know, and yet you are in the plot."

"I do not admit that I am in any plot."

"Well, whoever is your confederate wishes to be considered dead."

"Granted."

"He is coming here, and to see you."

"Granted."

"The count has no reason that I can discover, for wishing to be thought dead, and Gibson has every reason, as he does not wish to die upon the gallows."

"Who would?"

"No one that I know of, yet he deserves that fate."

"You say so."

"Now, Miss Branch, I would not accuse any man wrongfully."

"I once ran a man down, and all believed he would be hanged for a murder no one doubted his committing."

"I had but a slight clew that he was not the murderer."

"There was a big reward for him, and yet I sought out and found the murderer, cleared that man of the charge and took the other one to New Orleans to answer for other crimes."

"That man was Valentine Gibson."

"I like you and I do not like to see you duped."

"You need not run away from me again, for I will not trouble you, will not drag your name into notoriety, but I will track down that man, be he Count Armagnac, or Valentine Gibson, and know why it is that he wishes to be thought dead."

"I will protect you from him, will show you with your own eyes just what he is, for I am sure that he is not the count."

"But think that it is Valentine Gibson?"

"I am morally certain of it, Miss Branch, and I have to ask you if I bring you the proof, let you see with your own eyes, that Valentine Gibson is all that I claim him to be, that you will give me the opportunity to do so."

"Gladly! for never would I willingly be led to bind myself to one whom I know to be guilty of the charges that lie at Valentine Gibson's door."

"Nobly said, Miss Branch, and just what I expected of you."

"Now I promise you I will no longer dog your steps."

"To prove it I will give you my address, and if you change your address let me know, please."

"That is all I ask."

"I will do it."

"Here is my card."

"George Avery, Engraver," she said.

"You see I place confidence in you."

"Yes, but I supposed your name was Dick Doom."

"That is the name I bear at Secret Service Headquarters, in the Book of Doom, Miss Branch."

"I will remember your address, sir."

"Thank you, and let me say that I will save you from a fate worse than death," and with a bow the detective left.

Hardly had the door closed behind him when Fidele Branch threw herself back in her chair and cried bitterly.

"Great God! after all my trust do I begin now to doubt Valentine Gibson?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

TWO FRIENDS.

MR. VAN VECHTEN was just thinking of going to his home, for his carriage had just driven up to the door of his office for him, when a gentleman entered.

He was a man of commanding presence, wore a full blonde beard, and his hair clustered in almost golden ringlets about his neck and temples.

He had a florid face too, but his eyes were

black and very bright, though he kept them almost half closed as though from a defect in his sight.

He also wore eyeglasses sitting firmly upon his nose, and with a slender gold chain attached.

He was elegantly dressed in a Prince Albert coat, light doeskin pants, patent-leather boots and wore a black scarf in which glittered a handsome ruby.

His left hand was neatly gloved and held the right glove, also a gold-headed cane.

Mr. Van Vechten arose and stepped forward to greet him.

"Monsieur Van Vechten?" said the stranger with the slightest accent to his English.

"Yes, sir."

"I am Count Adair Armagnac, monsieur."

The count's welcome was a most cordial one.

"Yes, I see your very striking resemblance to your brother, to whom we all became greatly attached.

"Your kind letter I could not respond to, count; but now that you are here I will make amends."

"Come, you must go at once with me to my house, and Mrs. Van Vechten and my daughter will be glad to welcome you."

In vain the count urged that he would call later, the hospitable Bostonian carried him off in triumph.

Mrs. Van Vechten and Ruby had just returned from a drive, and they saw Mr. Van Vechten alight from his carriage with a distinguished stranger.

"It must be the count's brother, Ruby, for he has crepe on his hat," whispered Miss Van Vechten, and she added:

"How distinguished looking too."

"And like his brother, I think."

The next moment the count was presented to the ladies and went in to lunch with the family.

He had gone by his hotel, when with Mr. Van Vechten, and gotten from the safe a morocco bag, which he handed to Mrs. Van Vechten after lunch with the remark:

"These are yours, madam, for I wrote to your husband about the jewelry I had purchased."

"Ah, yes, and we owe you deepest gratitude," and Mrs. Van Vechten opened the sache.

"Ruby, every piece of your jewelry is here, and a great part of mine, but there is not one gem of the Montello jewels," said the lady.

The count looked inquiringly, and Mr. Van Vechten explained all about the stolen jewels.

"I am sure these were all that the man had from whom I got them, madam, for not another gem did he show."

"No, they were separated, beyond doubt; but we owe you a world of gratitude, Count Armagnac."

"How strange it is, papa, that to both this gentleman and his brother we have been placed under such deep obligations," said Ruby.

"My poor brother! poor Andre," said the count feelingly.

Though delighted at the return of Ruby's jewelry, and part of her own, Mrs. Van Vechten was deeply pained that the Montello jewels had not been found.

That the theft had been committed in Mexico there was no doubt now, and that caused the Van Vechtens, who knew all the facts of the case, to feel more keenly the danger of Senora Montello and her son, should the secret papers hidden in the jewelry be found.

Of course the count could give no clew as to the thief, or any theory, and he was desolate, he said, because he could not.

That day he dined at the Van Vechtens, but firmly refused the urgent invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Van Vechten to make his home their home while in Boston.

He must remain at the hotel, he said, as he would have much business to transact.

From that time on the count was, however, a very frequent visitor at the Van Vechten mansion.

He seemed to tire of hotel life after a few days, so secured for himself handsome furnished quarters, in a pleasant part of the city, and engaged a cook and valet to look after him.

He took these quarters, he explained to Mr. Van Vechten, as he expected a Mexican friend on to visit him soon, one who had been most kind to his brother, his brother's second, in fact, in the fatal duel, and afterward had extended his kindness to him.

This friend arrived soon after the count got settled in his new quarters.

He was an ex-officer of the Mexican Navy, and was known as Nunez De Silva.

That day there were two cards that went up to Mrs. Van Vechten, and they read:

"SEÑOR DON NUNEZ DE SILVA,
"Mexico."

And

"COUNT HENRI ADAIR ARMAGNAC,
"France."

The count presented his friend to the ladies, and they did all in their power to make him feel at home.

He was a dark-faced, good-looking, retiring man, yet possessed of courtly manners and well-informed.

At dinner Ruby thought that the Don drank a little too much, but she excused him as a friend of the count and a Mexican.

Weeks passed away and rumor began to go the rounds that Miss Ruby Van Vechten had been caught at last, and by a foreigner.

But by which foreigner no one seemed exactly to know.

Some said it was the count, they were certain.

Others were equally as sure that it was the Mexican who had won her.

When questioned by her intimates upon the subject, Miss Ruby Van Vechten assumed a manner so "childlike and bland," that the Heathen Chinee would have grown green with envy.

A few of Mrs. Van Vechten's intimates questioned her upon the subject.

But that lady only wished that she knew her self.

As for Mr. Van Vechten he would reply:

"Ruby is a woman and hence nobody knows."

But in her own heart Miss Ruby Van Vechten did know, though neither the Frenchman or the Mexican had yet discovered the secret to the satisfaction of either of them.

In fact a marked coldness existed between the two one-time friends.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LOST FOUND.

ONE afternoon Mr. Van Vechten went by special request to dine with Count Henri Adair Armagnac and Don Nunez De Silva.

The count had to explain that his servants had left him that day, and apologize for the awkwardness of one whom he had just gotten as a butler, while his cook was equally as bad.

But the dinner was gotten through with passable well, and then came a ring at the door-bell.

The servant ushered in two persons to see Mr. Van Vechten.

One was a rough-looking man in pea-jacket, top-boots and a slouch hat, which he failed to remove, and the other was a messenger-boy in uniform.

"Which is Mr. Van Vechten?" asked the man.

"I am, sir."

"What do you want of me, my man?"

"Your wife lost some jewels when she was in Mexico, didn't she?"

"She certainly did."

"And you puts up twenty thousand to get 'em, don't yer?"

"I certainly do."

"Good as wheat."

"Do you know anything about them?"

"I know it all."

"What do you know?"

"The fellow is drunk, Mr. Van Vechten, so I will send him away," said the count.

"No, I hain't drunk, and you don't send me away."

"What do you know about the jewels, my man?"

"Pardon me, count, but I think he is sober, and he may know something."

"I know it all."

"What do you know?"

"I has the jewels."

The count and the Don laughed, but the man said again:

"I has 'em."

"Where are they?"

"Right here."

"Hand me ther grip, sonny."

The messenger-boy handed over the "grip" he held, the man opened it and took out a buckskin bag.

"You know 'em, mister?"

"Perfectly well, my man."

"See if every one of 'em, hain't thar."

He emptied the bag as he spoke upon the cleared mahogany table before Mr. Van Vechten, who gave a cry of amazement, while the count and the Don uttered loud exclamations almost amounting to yells.

"There are the Montello jewels intact, and no mistake."

"Yes, the two necklaces, one of rubies the other of diamonds, the bracelets, cross, ear-rings, finger rings, diamond-studded miniatures, the lockets, brooches, snuff-boxes, this small jeweled case, this emerald comb, pins and all, yes, in all seventy-five separate pieces."

"These are the jewels, my man, and you shall have your reward, if you will accompany me to my home."

"Don't want it."

"Don't wish your reward?"

"I has it."

"How?"

The man looked at the messenger-boy, who gave a low whistle.

The butler appeared at one door, the male cook at the other, and both held revolvers in their hands.

"What does this mean?" gasped the count, while the Don started up, but sunk back in his seat.

"I'll tell yer."

"Yer se', Mr. Van Vechten, them two men?"

"Well, one of 'em claims ter be Count Henri Adair Armagnac— Hold on, Mister Count, for your butler and your cook is police officers, and there is more ter hear from if yer make it necessary, for I hain't no fool!"

"Now, Mr. Van Vechten, when you was attacked by bandits in Mexico one man was kilt. It was the count's friend, you thought; but it was not so, for it was the poor real count himself."

"He had, from love of a lady, befriended a felon, aided him to escape from jail, and they were traveling together."

"The count was killed and the other man at once claimed to be the count."

"He went back and buried the count, got his valuables and papers, joined your party, met the count's trunks in Vera Cruz, as they were shipped there by steamer, and you and your family left, believing that it was Count Armagnac, when it was Valentine Gibson, the escaped felon."

"After you left, this escaped gallows-bird played a bolder game."

"He had the full knowledge of the count from the papers in his baggage."

"He had, when left alone in your rooms, while you, your wife and daughter were at dinner, with skeleton keys unlocked Mrs. Van Vechten's trunk, and stolen the Montello jewels and those belonging to your wife and Miss Van Vechten."

"These Montello jewels were sent by Express at once to the United States, to be delivered only to the person presenting a duplicate of the receipt placed in the books, and paying a certain duty."

"The other jewelry was kept by this man."

"He wished to play his boldest game now, so must get rid of himself as Count Armagnac."

"To do this he brought into his confidence an old pal of his whom he met there."

"That Mexican is the man, and they arranged to kill the count."

"A quarrel was initiated, a duel followed, but it was between the Mexican and one whom he had had trouble with, and the count was supposed to be killed, and the body of the dead man was elegantly coffined and placed in the vault of the family of that Mexican scapegrace."

"In the mean time that man, in disguise, fled from Mexico, went to France, corresponded with the landlord of the hotel, as the count's brother, when he had no brother, and returning to Mexico got possession of the effects of the man who was killed in going to your rescue."

"He then wrote you, and arranged to come here, his Mexican ally in crime to follow him."

"The pretended count was to wed your daughter, cutting a big splurge on the jewels which he had sent on, and the Mexican was to get half the amount."

"The pretended count brought your wife all of the jewels taken from her, excepting those he used."

"He cashed Count Andre's letters of credit, and was living in fine style as you see."

"But there was a hitch in his affairs."

"He could not get those jewels away from the Express."

"I'll tell you why."

"I had shown to the manager that they were the stolen jewels, and so he was put off by stating to him that the book had been lost, with the duplicate receipt, and he should have them as soon as a certain amount of red tape had been gone through with."

"I had them all the time, or that is, since the arrival of this pretended count in your city."

"I wish to tell you further that this man determined to desert the noble woman who had so

faithfully believed in his innocence. He did write her from Mexico, three letters.

"One was of the count's death, and his escape."

"A second told her that he would return soon to the United States, and to meet him in Boston and become his wife."

"The third letter told her that detectives were upon his track and that he was going to some far-away land never to return."

"Instead, he came on to Boston as Count Armagnac, to wed your daughter if he could."

"Now this Mexican is wanted in Texas, for murders committed there, for I never forget a face, and I recognized him when I saw him in Mexico, wounded, for he was wounded in his duel with the man he killed, and who he pretended was Count Andre Armagnac."

"I recognized him then, and I recognized him again when I saw him here."

"I have requisition papers from Louisiana and Texas for these two men, and they shall go with me back to those States and die upon the gallows."

CHAPTER XXIX.

PROOF ON PROOF.

THE remarkable story of crime told by the man who had come with the messenger boy fairly astounded Mr. Van Vechten.

The man had drifted at once from his dialect, when he warmed up with his story, and spoke in a clear, decided voice.

There was no doubting the truth of a word that he said.

There were the Montello jewels.

There were the two accused men.

In the new butler was a police officer of the Boston force, and one not to be trifled with.

In the new cook was a detective, and a man of nerve.

The quarters of the two men were guarded besides, and there was no escape for them.

Then the man who had spoken had the look of one whom it would not do to trifling with.

"Never will I go with you!" shouted the pretended count.

"I will die first," cried the Mexican.

Their accuser smiled.

Then he continued:

"Mr. Van Vechten, I would not make a public exposure of this affair on account of yourself and family."

"I therefore came here to trap these men."

"I also wish to protect from exposure the noble woman who loved this unworthy man, but now loves him no longer, when she beholds him unmasked, as I gave her my pledge, should one day be the case."

"For this reason the requisition papers have been gotten secretly."

"These two officers, this lad and myself, are alone in the secret, save the chief of police of Boston, New York and New Orleans."

"They know all."

"That the conduct of this man will not hurt Miss Van Vechten I feel assured, for, even when believing him Count Adair she had a suspicion of him, and when I called upon her to-day I know what opinion she expressed, when I told her just what I would prove these two men to be."

"Mrs. Van Vechten may be disappointed at finding a pet plan of hers frustrated, but her joy at her daughter's escape will more than outweigh any regret she may feel."

"As for the lady who rescued this man from the gallows, she will raise no finger now to keep him from under its shadow."

"I have told you much, Mr. Van Vechten, have made the severest charges."

"All the proof I have given you is those jewels before you upon the table."

"Now I will offer you further proof."

Quick as a flash the speaker had sprung to the side of the accused American and in an instant had snatched off his blonde curling wig and eyeglasses.

"See, sir!"

"This man's beard is dyed a blonde hue, and he is none other than Valentine Gibson the escaped felon."

"It is false!" groaned the accused man.

The accuser laughed, and then continued:

"That man, sir, is a Mexican criminal as I said."

"Now, sir, to give you further proof, let me tell you that I am Dick Doom, the detective."

"Dick Doom! you?"

"Yes, Mr. Van Vechten, I am a Man of Many Masks, and in my present disguise you do not know me as you once saw me; but Valentine Gibson knows me only too well."

He bent toward the messenger-boy who had said something to him in a low tone.

"Yes, sir, and I will give you still another proof, one I had not expected to give, but I now have permission to do so."

"See! This is not a youth, as you suppose, but the lady who rescued that man from prison."

"Yes, I am Fidele Branch, who once loved you, Valentine Gibson, with all my heart and soul, for you saved my life at the risk of your own."

"I believed in your innocence. I could not believe that one who won my heart could be other than an honorable man."

"I trusted you, but you deceived me. I would not believe you guilty against all witnesses, all testimony, and I was willing to sacrifice myself by becoming Count Andre's wife, if he would save you from the gallows."

"He did so, and then wrote me, noble man that he was, that he released me from my pledge, that he would go his way through life, never allowing his path to cross mine again."

"Alas! it never will, and for you a noble soul was sacrificed, Valentine Gibson."

"Now let me tell you that as I once loved you, I now hate you—despise you! and only when the rope tightens around your neck will I feel that justice has been satisfied, your victims avenged."

"Mr. Van Vechten, do not longer doubt, for I declare that man to be Valentine Gibson, the murderer!"

Fidele Branch had spoken in a tone not to be mistaken, and Mr. Van Vechten arose and grasped her hand.

"Come, my child, you must go home with me to-night, for you will find there a sister in my daughter, a mother in my wife, a father in me."

"Nay, I will not have you say no, for it must be. Come, my child!"

"You brought these jewels here; so put them in your satchel again and take them home for me. You will, I know."

"Oh, what must I do?"

"I appeal to you my noble, my best of friends, Mr. Doom?"

"Mr. Van Vechten I know will drive by your home, Miss Branch, so that you may make a proper toilet, and then I would say that you go with him to his home, for I know the welcome you will receive, while your faithful servant will look after your home until you are ready to give it up and start South."

"I will do as you wish me to, Mr. Doom, for you have been so true, so good to me."

"Mr. Van Vechten, I thank you, sir, and accept your kind invitation, for I feel very, very much alone, to-night."

"Then come with me at once, Mr. Doom, will you need us any more to-night?"

"No, sir, I will care for these gentlemen. The New Orleans steamer is to await our coming on board, and I have all arrangements made for passage to the Crescent City."

"But you will return?"

"Oh, yes, within a couple of weeks, sir, I hope."

"But, let me ask you to see the chief of police about these quarters, sir, for all here belongs to the heir of Count Andre Armagnac, and must be sent to France, for I have been in correspondence with his family there."

"You neglect nothing, Doom."

"But, good-night. We will expect you back soon, as you have promised."

"Come, my child," and Mr. Van Vechten led Fidele from the room.

She turned at the door and gave a glance at Valentine Gibson, but he did not see her, for his head was bowed in his hands; he was the very picture of despair—a beaten, baffled, broken man.

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN Mrs. Van Vechten and Fidele Branch left the house and rendezvous of the men who had played so bold a game for a big stake, Dick Doom stepped forward and slipped the manacles upon one hand of each of the men.

"Now make a more fitting toilet for your journey," and the two prisoners were soon dressed in traveling suits, the police officer and detective watching them.

"Now, Worth, you go with me, and officer you remain in charge of these quarters until relieved by your chief."

"Yes, sir."

"Worth, bring that trunk with the baggage of these men in it, and we will drive with all haste to the detained steamer."

"Now, Gibson, you and De Silva must be heavily ironed."

When this was done, they all went out to a carriage in waiting, and an hour after, the steamer was bearing the four seaward.

That night Fidele Branch had gone with Mr. Van Vechten to his house, the jewels were returned to Mrs. Van Vechten, and the whole story told over again.

Fidele had gone by her home and made her toilet, and she was indeed received as a sister and daughter.

The papers knew only that two noted criminals had been arrested by a famous young detective, and that was all.

The "count," it was said, and the "Don," had both been refused by Ruby Van Vechten, and they had hastily departed for their own lands.

Thus was the secret kept hidden, though it became known that the same detective had found Mrs. Van Vechten's lost jewels, which were, in good time, turned over to young Montello, who, with his mother, had no longer cause for dread.

In due time Dick Doom again returned to Boston, and in his disguise of an old gentleman, as when first seen by the Van Vechtens.

He reported that one night at sea, Valentine Gibson had sprung overboard, all chained as he was, and thus had met his fate.

The Mexican, however, was taken to Texas, where he was quickly hanged, without the formalities of a trial.

The Van Vechtens accepted the invitation of Fidele to return home with her and spend the winter, and when Ruby met Brandon Branch, who returned to Europe just after their arrival, it was a case of love at first sight between them, and Fidele was as happy as they were at the result, while Mrs. Van Vechten was forced to admit that an American son-in-law was a great deal better for an American girl than a foreigner, even if he wore a crown.

As for Dick Doom, he went his separate way in life, following steadily in the path which he always asserted Fate had destined him to pursue.

That destiny was to be a detective, and the name he won in his mysterious and perilous career, the adventures he passed through, the deadly dangers he faced, in ferreting out crime and hunting down criminals, will form the foundation for other romances of the reality in the life of Dick Doom, the Man of Many Masks.

THE END.

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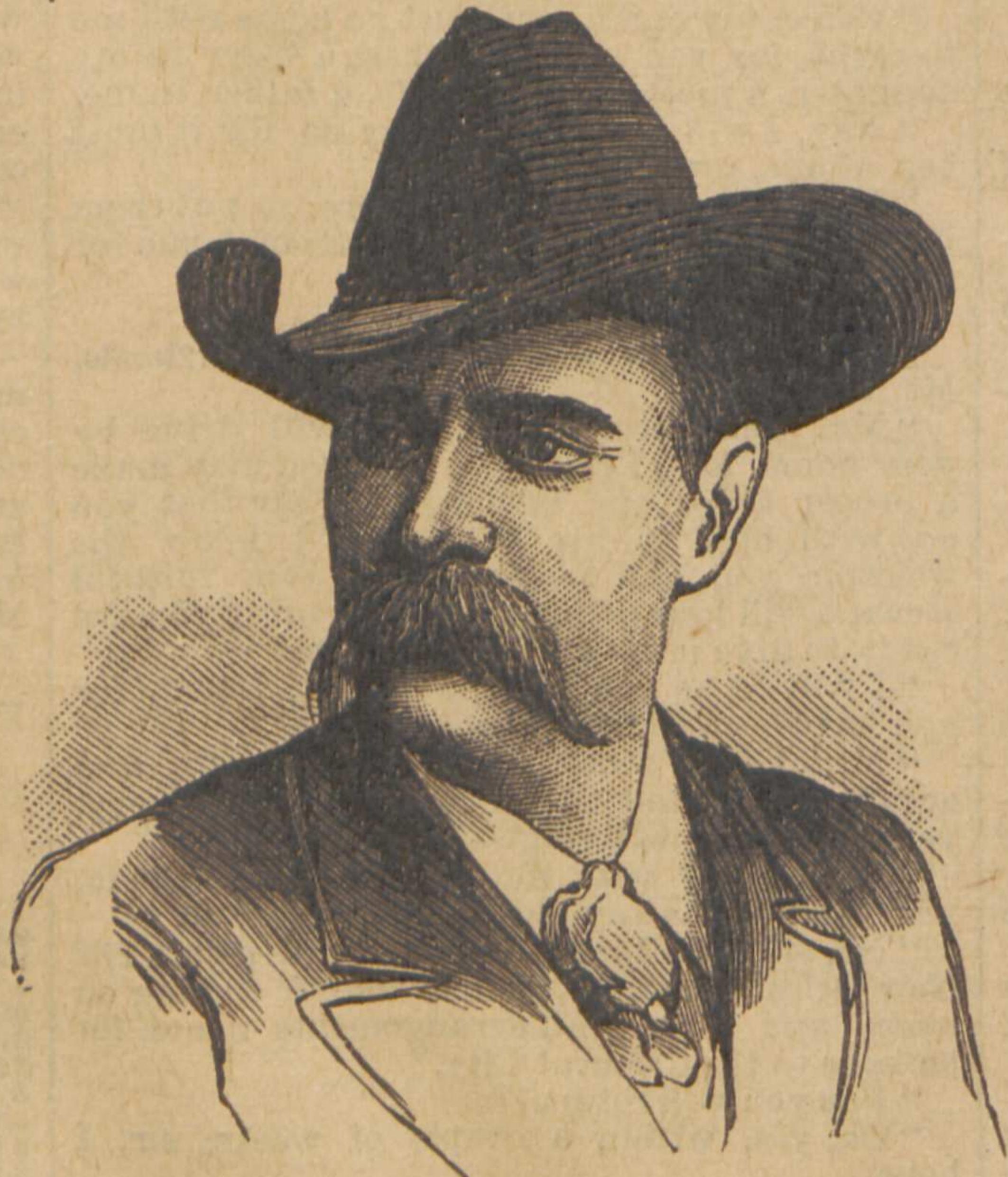
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